

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

JANUARY, 1923

Vol. LXXVII

NUMBER 4

Pepperpot

THE ADVENTURES OF THORNE FAIRFAX, LATE FIRST
LIEUTENANT, UNITED STATES NAVY, ON
A TROPIC ISLE OF ROMANCE

By Henry C. Rowland

Author of "The Sultana," "Pearl Island," etc.

PEPPERPOT was on my mind that balmy morning, as I stretched out in my deck chair and watched the little flying fish spattering out and skimming away as our bow waves swept across the roof of that many-storied flat which is the sea.

There were several reasons for my thinking of pepperpot, the least of them being gustatory. I had just been told that pepperpot was a savory of the past, and I was deploring the loss of another note—or chord, perhaps—of local color. For pepperpot used to be a classic West Indian dish, like *bonillabaisse* on the Mediterranean coast of France and curry in the Far East. A good pepperpot should have simmered along for several generations, and its contents should have been replenished by a

variety of ingredients, depending on what happens to be left over at meals. Part of its charm was that of never knowing just what flavor might predominate.

In the past, as a hungry sailor on liberty, I had eaten largely of pepperpot, and it lingered in my memory most pleasantly. I thought its passing even more regrettable because, as a dish of mysterious component parts and of a high degree of pungency, it was an exponent of the West Indian population, mixed yet homogeneous, and the result of long continued stewing well admixed with spice. The Caribbean itself was a sort of pepperpot, of which even such choice articles as might have escaped its churning maw had yet their sprinkling of hot stuff.

Well, it did not matter much to me. I was more apt to live on stewed monkey than

pepperpot, and I was not southward bound for the purpose of eating or even drinking, or to enjoy the vivid color of the Caribbean.

The hurricane of war had left me stranded on the beach, like many another "gentleman of fortune"—as the pirates of these waters used to call themselves. I had quite a bale of credentials—discharges from merchant ships on which I had sailed, a master mariner's certificate, a Turkish decoration, a French decoration bestowed for having taken a ship's boat to the rescue of some castaways when I was a deck officer of a *Compagnie Générale Transatlantique* liner. Also I was of the Loyal Legion and the American Legion, and had an honorable discharge as first lieutenant, United States Navy. I was author of many descriptive articles on travel; but what was more important than all of this, I was badly in need of a job to feed and clothe and keep me in my right, which is to say my cheerful, state of mind.

It does not sound as if this should have presented much of a problem to a sound and vigorous young man of thirty-two, but I had found it so. The prostration of foreign trade and shipping was such that I could discover no attractive opening in maritime channels. I had managed to put by a decent little grubstake, and on learning that diamonds were being washed out from the gravel on the Mazaruni, I had taken passage for British Guiana, to see if I could manage to scratch up a few. I was on my way, intending to call at Barbados, because I hoped to find an acquaintance there who would be able to give me a good deal of useful information.

We had crossed the tropic of Cancer the day before, and officers and crew had shifted from navy blue into spotless white—thus reversing the process of the variable hare and other animals who, in mimicry of nature, change from dark to white as the cold, instead of heat, approaches.

I took my mind off pepperpots and opened a very French novel—"La Route Amoureuse," described on the title-page as a *roman inédit de l'amour et de la guerre*. It had been loaned me the day before by a young and pretty fellow passenger, a war widow named Mme. Dieudonné, who was returning from France to her native Guadeloupe. I had not yet examined this contribution to post-bellum literature, but it now opened itself to reveal the unmounted photograph of a girl.

It was a very intimate portrait. At the first glance I ought really to have put it back in the book and returned the volume to its owner, with the perfectly truthful remark that I had outgrown that sort of reading; but the face tempted me, and I fell.

Many youngish men, especially seafarers who spend the most of their time removed from womenkind, are apt to conjure up a sort of dream face, vaguely idealized, but representing in a nebulous way the type that most appeals to them. The face of this portrait crystallized just such a fancy of my own. I had never seen a girl who looked like that, but I had imagined her, so that it seemed as if I were looking at my own creation.

I shall describe it briefly, without apology. She was standing on a flat rock, her background a big traveler's palm, with fronds spread behind the figure in a sort of geometric design. To the left a foaming waterfall plunged down into a yeasty pool.

The girl, apparently, had just come out of this Diana's basin, and had been caught by the shutter as she turned. Her bathing dress, a white flowing robe, was wet, as were also the ripples of her long hair, which shimmered about her bare shoulders to make a sort of nimbus where the high light struck their edges. The expression of her face was startled, and one bare, glistening arm was raised as if in protest.

It was an exquisite pose, and one that a figure painter could scarcely have imagined. If he had imagined it, he could scarcely have profited by it, because it was not tenable for more than the fraction of a second needed to record it.

My first thrill of admiration was followed by a pang of conscience, as if I had been guilty of spying on the original. It struck me also that Mme. Dieudonné was very much to blame for her carelessness with such a portrait of a friend. This girl was evidently a thoroughbred. The picture, I thought, had probably been taken somewhere on the big estate of which Mme. Dieudonné's father was proprietor, for I had learned that he was a man of wealth and importance in the West Indies.

I turned the print over and found the traces of some penciled inscription that had been erased. All that I could decipher was the end of the last word—"inique."

"Martinique," I said to myself.

Not much to go on, yet perhaps enough. There could be no other such girl on Mar-

tinique. She was unique. The light had been perfect to portray the lovely features in detail, and the lens in the camera must have been a good one. It occurred to me that if I were a rich idler, instead of a poor soldier of fortune bound for the Mazaruni to scratch for diamonds, I should have set other objectives aside and entered on a quest to find the owner of that face. After all, Martinique is not a very big island.

These profitless fancies were cut off at sight of Wayne, the chief wireless operator, coming down the deck with a purposeful expression that had me as its objective. Wayne and I had been quite chummy from the start. All the officers, in fact, had shown me particular consideration on learning not only that I was a seafaring man out of a job, but that for about a year I had helped to sweep the channels clear of mines ahead of them as they were entering French ports—Lorient and St. Nazaire and La Pallice. We were also in agreement about certain features of the United States Shipping Board.

I swung my legs aside, and Wayne came to rest on the extension of the steamer chair.

"What's on your mind?" I asked.

"I've just relayed a message that might interest you, Fairfax," said he. "We're not supposed to spill the radios we hand along, but it struck me that in this case I might be rendering a service not only to the sender but to you. Do you happen to know about MacNeil Grosvenor?"

"Of the Shipping Board?" I answered.

"That's the bird."

"I don't know him personally," I said; "but it seems to me I've heard my father speak of him. The papers were knocking him hard some time ago—not accusing him directly of graft, but hinting that when all the profiteers were rounded up he might possibly be among those present. Why? Have they landed him?"

"Not by a thousand miles. He's radioed from his yacht somewhere hereabouts that he wants a sailing master sent to Martinique in a hurry."

"Radioed to whom?"

"The yacht agents—Cams, Des Moines & Bayne, New York. Got sore with his skipper, it seems, and means to fire him at San Juan. Here might be your chance, if you're not proud."

I laughed, then glanced down at the back of the photograph lying on my knee. Could

it be that destiny was taking a hand in the game? That after a good many knocks fortune was rolling her wheel my way?

I had never thought of trying for a yacht billet; but at this moment it sounded a lot better to me than scratching gravel in the welter swelter of the Mazaruni. I thought of that lovely face.

"Well," I said, "much obliged for the tip; but I don't see much chance, since you've sped the little zigzags on their way."

"There might be, though," said Wayne. "He's in a good deal of a hurry, and he could always countermand his message."

"Wouldn't it get you in wrong for spilling it?" I asked.

"He needn't know. I could radio Grosvenor in my own name, something like this: 'Passenger aboard this ship, Thorne Fairfax, late first lieutenant U. S. N., formerly commanding mine sweeper French coast, A 1 record, might like billet sailing master your yacht. Shall I tell him of your need and have him await you Martinique? Signed Wayne, chief radio officer S. S. Josephine.'"

"Sure it couldn't do you any harm?" I asked.

"Don't see how. Nothing personal about it, and there's no telling how long he might have to wait. I hate to think of your going up into that pest hole with those lousy diamond diggers!"

I looked again at the photograph.

"Come to Martinique and find me," it seemed to invite.

"Well, then shoot her off, old man," I said. "A thousand thanks for the kind thought. I'm no longer proud, and something tells me that I'd be a rotten rock bound."

"Right-o," said Wayne, and went up the ladder to his sparking box.

Immediately a sizzling crackle told me that my application for a job was vibrating the circumambient ether. It was a familiar language to me, and when presently it ceased to talk across the leagues of sea that separated me from a potential billet, I reflected that these could not be very many—a hundred miles, perhaps. The yacht's radius of sending would not be great, as otherwise its owner would probably have addressed his needs to the cable station at San Juan. He had fired them out on the off chance of picking up some ship; but it struck me as almost a miracle that the message should have showered down on the

head of a person competent and more than willing to fill Mr. Grosvenor's immediate requirements.

I had a hunch that the job was going through, and I was right, for a little later Wayne came back to where I was sitting plunged in thought.

"You're on!" said he, and handed me a slip of paper.

WIRELESS OPERATOR WAYNE, S. S. Josephine:

Know something about Fairfax. Retain his services as sailing master. Instruct him to wait for yacht at Fort de France. Send following message: "Cams, Des Moines & Bayne, New York—Disregard request for sailing master. Have found capable man to join yacht at Martinique."

"Well, that's that," I said. "What's the use of job hunting? Here I've been wearing out shoe leather for days trying to find a billet, and hung around the offices of the Shipping Board until they had to lay me like a ghost; and now I sit here with a silly French novel, and the late high muck-amuck of that very shop showers me from the blue with the flattering news that he knows about me and desires eagerly to take me on!"

"That's apt to happen when you go ahead and tackle something anyhow, no matter how rotten," Wayne answered wisely—of which remark please take notice, you other ex-service men.

But I cannot say that I was unqualifiedly delighted. Being master of a ship is one thing; operating the toy of a multimillionaire is another. I cannot say honestly that the portrait of the girl had turned the trick; but when one has to decide a course of action on the spur of the moment, every little factor counts, especially when the person to decide is richer in impulse than common sense.

I had been kicked along by three successive shocks—first, the distaste of a sailor for an uncertain job ashore; second, the portrait of that lovely girl whom I believed to be on Martinique, where I might have to wait a few days for the yacht; and, third, the pleasant jolt of having somebody claim from the void that he knew something about me and wanted to retain my services. Recent experiences had almost convinced me that nobody knew anything about me, wished to know anything about me, or desired these same distinguished services at any price.

The next obvious duty was an effort to learn something about the girl who had

contributed her unwitting part to tip the scale; so I went in search of Mme. Dieudonné—whom, by another link in the chain of destiny, I found, for a wonder, alone.

I held out the portrait.

"*Madame*," I said, "who and what and where is this wonderful girl?"

She glanced at the print, then snatched it out of my hand with a little scream.

"*Quel horreur!* You found that in the book? I thought I had put it safely away. Oh, what if Jas—"

She clapped her hand against her mouth.

"Jazz?" I echoed. "That's no sort of a name for such a nymph."

"She would never forgive me!" cried *madame*. "She was very angry when I snapped it. She almost fought me to get the roll and expose it to the light; but I had some other exposures, and I promised to develop them myself and destroy the film of this one. And so I did, but the picture was so beautiful I could not resist printing one for myself."

"Who is she?" I begged.

"I shall not tell you. It's quite enough that you have seen it at all."

The soft diapason of ship's noises was rent at this moment by a black bugler sounding the ferocious call to food. *Madame* finished the sweet cocktail on the table in front of her, then rose.

"Come on," said she. "I'm hungry as a wolf."

"Tell me at least where she lives," I implored.

"I'll tell you nothing. I am disgusted with myself for having been so careless."

"What difference does it make, since I'm bound for the Mazaruni to hunt diamonds? Have a heart, *chère madame*. Give me at least a star to gaze at until I fill a lonely grave on the edge of a jungle river!"

"You're not going to fill any grave just yet awhile. When you come back with your pockets stuffed with diamonds, you can call on me at Pointe à Pitre, and I may tell you a little about her; but she is not for the poor soldier of fortune that you say you are. Come now, forget it. To table!"

II

For the rest of the run to Guadeloupe I devoted myself to *la veuve soyeuse*, as somebody had christened that silky widow, Mme. Dieudonné. I thought that I was being very crafty, for I made no further

reference to the lovely original of the photograph found in the novel, and kept my change of plans a secret.

My idea, of course, was to get the good will of Edmée Dieudonné, and to convince her that I was not the ordinary fortune-hunting adventurer. I hoped that when we parted she might tell me what I wanted so much to know, if by that time I could make her believe me to be the right sort of a chap—a man of good family but no money, who would endeavor to remedy that unfortunate combination by taking any honest seagoing billet for which he was qualified, rather than lobby around the offices of rich friends or polish the surface of a desk chair.

This plan struck me as splendid strategy; but unfortunately my past experience had been entirely of arms and men, with scarcely any day or night school course on arms and women. All that I hoped for or desired was the pretty widow's sympathy and interest and good opinion. With this end in view I went about the conquest of her friendship conscientiously and with no thought of the possible cost.

The ship had general cargo enough for the Virgin Islands, St. Thomas and St. Croix, also for the British islands of St. Kitts and Antigua, to keep her most of the day discharging at these places, and I took advantage of the opportunity to invite Mme. Dieudonné ashore for automobile excursions. A motor car in the Windward Islands, with a black chauffeur intent on profiting by the infrequent visit of a passenger ship and making all the mileage possible to the time limit, is a perfectly solvent medium for the mixing of sympathetic relations between its scrambled passengers, be they young and of opposite sex. Ship-board propinquity between times also helps.

Being in many ways dense and mentally myopic, I never discovered that I had been overshooting the butts of friendship, and that my arrows had been breaking things beyond, until the night before our arrival at Pointe à Pitre, where we were due at about two of the morning. Sitting on deck beside this charming lady, to whom I had been paying such marked attention, I began to tell her how much I had enjoyed her companionship, and how sad I should feel at parting with her the next morning, when she interrupted in a serious tone, quite unlike her usual gay one:

"I don't like the idea of your going to

the Mazaruni. It is not the thing for a gentleman like you, and a former naval officer, to work with that riffraff. Besides, there is not enough to gain."

"My plans have been changed," I said. "I'm not going there immediately."

I told her of having accepted the billet of sailing master on Mr. Grosvenor's yacht.

"That is not much better," said Mme. Dieudonné. "It's not worthy of you."

"It would be the means toward an end," I said. "It will furnish me a decent grubstake to tackle the Mazaruni game."

"But that is not worth your while," said she. "I happen to know something about it. My father is a planter and banker of Guadeloupe, and in relations with the great Maison Cerise, which controls most of the diamond fields. The stones are small commercial diamonds, used for cutting and grinding. Few of them are as large as two carats, the record being about ten carats, and such finds very rare."

"That's not so bad, even at the current price of fifteen dollars a carat," I said. "There's only ten per cent to pay if you dispose of them at the bank."

"Good enough for negroes and half castes," she said contemptuously, "but not for such a man as you. I have been thinking a good deal about it. My father is a man of wealth and influence, associated with all the most important commercial affairs down here. I am sure that he would find some opening for you, if I were to ask him."

Even then I did not guess what was in the back of her mind. There is probably no such fool as a seagoing fool. I was merely touched by her kindness.

"It's awfully good of you," I said; "but I'm promised to Mr. Grosvenor, and couldn't go back on him now. Besides, I don't know a thing about business."

"Mr. Grosvenor could easily find another captain," said she. "Why waste your time at something that has no future?"

"But I shouldn't think of letting you bother your father about me," I objected.

"Why not, if I wish it?" she demanded.

"Besides, he might be very glad to have a man like you, whom he could trust—a gentleman and ex-officer. You speak French fluently, and some Spanish, and you understand ships. With your intelligence, you could quickly learn the business part."

I gave her hand a little squeeze.

"You are more than kind, *madame*," I said; "but you see I'm not the sort to accept a job and then chuck it a few days later for something that looks better. No, I'm promised to Mr. Grosvenor, and he's counting on me. He's on his way to Martinique at this moment. Since I'm apt to be there for a few days, at least, you might relent enough to tell me about the picture girl, now that you feel I'm to be trusted."

She snatched away her hand and sat upright. Even then I thought her angry only at my persistence and her own carelessness.

"You may as well put that girl out of your head. She is not for you. Her family was ruined by the eruption of Pelée twenty years ago, and all but her mother destroyed. They have almost nothing to live on—a tiny income from some relatives in France. With her family and its traditions, she has absolutely got to marry a rich man. It would be an act of poor friendship both to them and to you for me to let you get acquainted. And," she added naively, "you are just the type she would be apt to fall in love with—you with your big, lean body and chow-dog hair and pale eyes—and their stupid blindness to your own best interests!"

She leaned back, breathing fast from vexation—or at least I took it to be vexation.

"Then you refuse to tell me a single thing about her?" I asked.

"Of course I do. On the contrary, I shall write her mother a letter to go by this ship, and warn her that there is a stubborn American adventurer without a *son* in his pocket who has seen the shameful picture of Ja—Jacqueline!"

"Oh, come!" I interrupted laughingly. "You can't slide that over. You said 'Jazz' before. I've been down the Jazz column, and the only thing that fits is Jasmine."

"Well, then, you had better keep away from Jasmine. Her mother would not hesitate to put a bullet through you, after reading the letter that I shall send her. I mean to confess my fault and warn her that you have seen the photo and become infatuated, and that you intend to find Jasmine at whatever cost. You had better not try. Tempers are quick and hot down here, and Jasmine's mother has suffered enough to make her irresponsible at times. She is as jealous of her daughter as a she-bear of a single cub."

"But I have no designs on Jasmine," I

protested, a good deal astonished at her sudden heat. "I'm in no position to have, and probably shan't be for years, if ever. Besides, I don't want to marry, anyhow. If I did, I shouldn't ask for greater happiness and honor than to be the proud possessor of this."

I laid my hand on hers, thinking that I had made rather a graceful if not absolutely truthful speech.

Let others benefit by the folly of such philandering. I describe this episode not through any vanity, goodness knows, but because it has a direct bearing on the furious events that followed, and offers a human document on the danger of fatuous romancing and playing the cavalier for an ulterior motive, especially with ladies of tropical temperament, and in their home waters.

Officers of passenger ships know all about that contagious epidemic described as "sea love." They are indifferent to its ravages, as they have found it to run its course in about a week, and the symptoms to disappear on feeling solid ground beneath the feet. It is a disorder first caused and then cured by propinquity more or less enforced. An afflicted couple, yearning to kiss each other at the end of the first few days, would probably desire ardently to kill each other at the end of ten or twelve.

But I had never been an officer of a passenger ship, and only once or twice a passenger myself, for that matter. Moreover, my shipmate relations with Edmée Dieu-donné had not confined themselves to the vessel, but had brimmed over upon the beach, and inland within the cubicular limits of a bucketing flivver or other churn. While I had escaped contagion, having another little flying fish to fry, she, being highly susceptible at the time, had soaked in the honeyed poison deeply. If I had been anything in male human guise, except perhaps a Death's Head Hussar, the result would probably have been the same.

As it was, being merely a plain fool, I was not at all prepared for the grip of her strong little hand as it turned upward in mine, or for the gush of molten words that poured from her lips, like lava from the crater of a busy little volcano. I was too much bewildered and embarrassed to do more than sit and listen stupidly, while this incandescent young widow proceeded to finish for me the love-making which she believed me to have started, but which she

thought me too proud to finish for myself. As Edmée saw it, I could not, as a man of high family traditions, ask for the hand and heart of a charming heiress like herself when I had not the price of an engagement ring in my pocket.

Once started, she was as hard to stop as a miniature Mont Pelée; but I had to manage it at any cost, and quickly. There was a deck stateroom window close by, and I had the growing conviction that some woman passenger was listening just inside it, for the hour was late.

"You mustn't say such things," I said desperately. "You don't really mean them, you know. In a week's time you'll have forgotten all about me."

She sprang up suddenly and stood for a moment staring and panting, her eyes fairly scintillating sparks through the warm, humid murk.

"Then why have you let slip no opportunity for making me care for you?" she demanded.

Of course, the worst answer possible bungled out of my mouth.

"I wanted your friendship—" I began. "Then it was my friendship!" she interrupted. "I begin to understand. You wanted to gain my confidence, hoping that I would tell you about Jasmine! You are very clever, and I am very stupid—still, not altogether stupid, for I don't think I have told you very much. Well, you have not learned much from me, but Jasmine's mother shall learn a good deal about you, *mon ami*, so you had better not try to seek them out, if you value a whole skin!"

There came a stifled giggle from the greatly diverted eavesdropper just inside the open window. Mme. Dieudonné heard it this time. She gave me a blighting look and turned away. I made no effort to detain her. She went below.

"Shakespeare was right," I said sadly to myself; "but I really didn't scorn her. Too much pepperpot!"

Off Dominica, Wayne received another wireless from Grosvenor.

Delayed at San Juan by losing main topmast in squall. Instruct Fairfax to await yacht Fort de France. Cabling five hundred dollars to his credit Royal Bank Canada. Have engaged local pilot for run to Martinique. Hope to arrive within a week.—GROSVENOR.

The next day I disembarked at Fort de France and installed myself in that cheer-

ful hostelry, the Grand Hotel de la Paix. I was assigned a room on the top floor, a sort of bachelors' quarters, where I was warmly welcomed and made to feel at home by three fellow guests of the staff of the Royal Bank of Canada. They had just come in for the midday recess, from eleven until two. There entered presently a handsome young chap, who introduced himself with a friendly smile.

"I'm Benton," he said, "manager of the United States Trading Company depot, and American vice consul. Wayne and I are old chums, and he told me about your change of plans."

We went into Benton's room, which was large, and took up the whole width of the building at one end, the windows opening on two streets. Diagonally opposite was the Palais de Justice, a pretty building, French Renaissance. On the next corner stood the big cathedral, of which the steeple was curiously unfinished, merely an open iron framework—a precaution against hurricanes, which sometimes did enormous damage.

I was leaning across the sill, looking down the street and admiring the multi-colored throng of passers-by. There was a touring car in front of the cathedral, and, as I watched idly, a man and a girl came out and got into the car. It started down the street toward the hotel, passing directly under the window.

The man wore a pith helmet, but I caught a glimpse of a swarthy face with a small black mustache waxed to the tips. Then, just under the window, the girl looked up straight at me.

The sill being low, I nearly fell out—for it was Jasmine! There could be no doubt about it. I recognized the contours of her lovely face, roundly oval, with eyes that looked touched up by reason of their double fringe of black lashes, the little French tip-tilted nose, and the rather wide, smiling mouth.

For a moment she looked straight at me, then the car whisked past the corner. I rushed to the other window. My new friends must have thought I had gone suddenly crazy with the heat.

All that I could see now was the back of the car.

III

In the week that followed I learned a lot about the island. Practically the entire ex-

port of Martinique is rum, and I saw about an acre of filled casks in the yards of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique waiting shipment. Rum is also the colonial beverage—*le punch*, ninety per cent rum, with a dash of sirup and ice and a slice of lime. One serves himself *ad libitum* with the liquid fire, the cost of a drink being fifty centimes—about four cents, at the prevailing rate of exchange.

One could get boiling drunk for twelve cents, but one does not, because the first drink brings out the prickly heat with a yell, and after the second, if immediately imbibed, one can feel one's bones begin to calcine and the blood to sing, like a kettle. The sensible man eschews rum, except to apply it externally when tinctured with bay leaves. Light wines are safer and more comfortable, and not much more costly.

We bathed in the sea at Fond Nigaud, in clear, delicious water in which one could scarcely sink, and at Absalon and Alama, in cold, limpid streams crashing down in cataracts. I could not be sure about the pool. Getting intimate with Benton, I told him the whole story of the photograph. It stirred his romantic side, and, being himself a sort of "Who's Who in Martinique," he assured me that there could be no difficulty in finding the girl.

All of this time I was naturally wondering a good deal what sort of a billet I had let myself in for. Back there in Virginia my kinsfolk would have reared on their hind legs and pawed the air if they had known that I, Thorne Fairfax, had accepted a position as sailing master on a rich man's yacht. My sea service, while considerable, had been entirely aboard cargo or government vessels. I had never been employed aboard a passenger ship, nor had I been shipmates with an owner.

It was therefore with a certain embarrassment that I listened to Benton as he swung in smilingly to tell me that the three-masted schooner-rigged yacht Integrity was reported coming into the roads under power. I was ready to undertake my duties. A local tailor had built me some uniforms, both blue and white. Feeling that I ought to report as soon as possible, I went down to the jetty, where I found the pilot in the act of putting off, and on explaining my position he invited me to go with him.

The yacht was a beautiful and imposing toy, measuring, I thought, about a hundred

and fifty feet on the water line, and much resembling the Atlantic, holder of the transatlantic sailing record. She glided silently in with scarcely a ripple in her wake, and let go her anchor about half a mile off the Savana.

As the pilot's boat rounded up to come alongside, a portly gentleman in white serge and a high-crowned helmet—a headgear that seemed most inappropriate with sailing gear—came to the rail and stood with his hands jammed into his trouser pockets, legs apart, staring down at us—or rather at me, for he ignored the pilot. One might ask, why a pilot with a schooner at anchor? The functionary, however, was acting for the captain of the port, harbor master, customs, police, and health officer.

A little embarrassed, I saluted.

"Hello, Fairfax!" the portly gentleman growled into his thick drooping mustache, as if we were already acquainted.

He did not even take his hand from his pocket to return my salutation, yet his tone was not unpleasant. I was soon to discover that Harrison Grosvenor, though to the manor born, was first and last a business man, and that he had formed the habit of shorthanding not only his commercial but his social intercourse. He was curt of speech, but not unfriendly.

I forgot him for a moment as we slid alongside the companionway. Another face had appeared over the rail—a girl's face that struck me for a moment as curiously familiar. It was boyish, especially as seen from beneath, at an upward slant that would make any face look round.

The pilot went aboard, and I followed at his heels. Mr. Grosvenor gave the pilot a nod, then offered me his hand.

"Glad to see you, Fairfax," said he. "Used to know your father when you were a kid. You've got his jaw and light eyes. Bit of luck, catching you on the wing!" He turned and spoke to the girl. "Carol, this is Captain Fairfax. My daughter, captain."

The young girl smiled and gave me a cool but friendly nod. On observing her at close range, the familiarity of her face was explained. I had no doubt seen her portrait in the society columns of some magazine or Sunday photogravure supplement. She was fair of coloring, though not distinctly blond, with dark blue eyes and boyish features. She was about twenty, I thought, but with the sturdiness of a big

little girl rather than a young woman—a grown up child, as one might say. Still, there were pretty curves to her athletic figure, and she was of good height.

Mr. Grosvenor turned to speak to the pilot, and I was a little surprised to hear him using colloquial French. Then, as I was asking Miss Grosvenor about their voyage, he turned to me and said abruptly:

"Let's go below."

I followed him to his cabin. It was spacious and comfortable, but with none of the sybaritic features so often found on modern yachts. He sat down and offered me a cigar, which I declined, then lighted one himself.

"I'm down here to cool off," said he. "Much more bedeviling back home, and I'd have run amuck. First they hollered 'profiteer' at me because I made a decent turnover in wheat and sugar, and then 'grafter,' when I tried to get some sound bottoms for the Shipping Board. I may be the first, but not the second. They were hollering 'Stop, thief!' when I bought this boat and sailed away, but they took it out in hollering. You might as well know, if you don't already."

I shook my head.

"Well, that's that, as the English say. Now about your billet aboard. You're fully qualified, of course. Got your master's papers with you?"

"Yes, sir," I answered. "I tried to get a Shipping Board vessel, but there was nothing doing."

"'Nothing doing' is right," he said grimly. "I found that out. All they do is to jaw. I might have stayed with 'em, at that, if my doctors hadn't got my goat. Gave me an outside limit of three months to live unless I quit everything cold. Told me if I lost my temper I was apt to lose my life. At that rate I was due to drop dead several times a day in the Shipping Board, so I chucked it; and I've been mad every day for the last month."

"What about, sir?" I asked.

"The way things have been going aboard this packet. Andersen, the mate, is a steady, middle-aged Norwegian, and he's all right. So is Ito, the steward; but the skipper got it into his nut that he was owner, so I fired him. He was no good, anyhow. Then my engineer and wireless operator showed signs of getting fresh with Carol, so he hit the beach, too. The hands are some sort of scrub casuals from the

transport service, and this is where *they* get off. When does the next ship sail for New York?"

"The Parima is due here to-morrow, northward bound, sir," I said.

"Then you can pay off to-morrow and get their passages back by her. We'll be here for a week, at least, so you'll have time to pick up a native crew. I had a cub medico, but he was seasick the whole time, so I let him go at Nassau. Yachting isn't what it used to be. Carol's maid balked at the last moment, so we sailed without one. Just as well. Women are a nuisance aboard a boat, and it doesn't do my daughter any harm to brush her own hair. We've all got too soft, and the younger set at home is losing all sense of decency, with booze and dope and disgraceful dancing. Some of us old-timers were swift, but we had a sense of the fitness of things, and didn't mix our parties. I wanted to get my daughter away from the crowd she was trailing with, so I had the doctor tip her off that I was a dying man, and might cash in at any moment. Maybe he was right, but I'm feeling better now. This heat seems to do me good. Opens up the pores and loosens my asthma."

He was looking me over keenly as he talked, and I could feel the penetrating power of his keen, assaying eyes. He then asked me several questions about myself, and I told him briefly of my little life's tragedy—a career ruined by expulsion from the Naval Academy, the summer before graduation, for a silly quarrel at Halifax. I added a brief account of my going to sea as mate of a "Horner," and later running the German blockade until my ship was "torped" off Belle Isle; and then, when we got into the war, my getting command of a mine sweeper.

"Well, you came back, anyhow," said Mr. Grosvenor.

"Part of the way," I answered bitterly; "not all. I wanted to stick on in the navy, but I wasn't let."

"Republics are ungrateful," he quoted. "What do we care? We delivered the goods. Like Martinique?" Without waiting for my answer, he asked with a sort of curious eagerness: "Got pretty well acquainted already?"

"Yes, sir," I answered. "It doesn't take long in a colony, especially a French colony, when you know the language."

He looked thoughtful.

"We may stick on here for a week or two. It's all new stuff for Carol. Now, how about your *quid pro quo*?"

"Whatever you paid the last man, sir."

"I paid the rotter four hundred a month—just four hundred more than he was worth. He couldn't sail her for sour apples. I use sail altogether when I can, especially in the tropics. The motor heats and stinks things up. This boat's a good sailer."

The steward announced luncheon at this moment.

"Come join us, Fairfax," said Mr. Grosvenor. As I hesitated, he added gruffly: "Oh, forget it! You're the son of an old friend, and your kennel register is as good as mine, if not better. I hate swank."

Luncheon was served under the quarter-deck awning, and it was good. I soon discovered that Carol was a little anxious about her father, for she watched him closely, and deprived him of a dish or two. Mr. Grosvenor did not protest, though he grumbled a bit.

"Holding me down to my twelve hundred calories," he said.

After luncheon he went below for a nap. There was too much glare on deck—reflection from the water. I excused myself and made rounds of inspection with Mr. Newman; then I unpacked and stowed my things in my small but comfortable cabin. The steward, a Japanese, told me that Mr. Grosvenor had said I might have one of the larger guest rooms, if I preferred; but I chose the captain's cabin, because of its quick access on deck by the pantry companionway. Being forward of the saloon bulkhead, I could skip up in pyjamas.

Mr. Andersen, the Norwegian mate, was evidently a sound if rather gloomy Scandinavian seaman—a big, brawny viking of a man, who was no doubt fully competent to discharge all his duties aboard under the direction of a skipper. He was scarcely the sort of individual, however, to enforce discipline on such a crew as I had occasion to look over a little on making the rounds of the schooner with him.

As Mr. Grosvenor had said, the hands were a pretty poor lot—Americans of sorts, mostly hyphenated, to judge from their appearance, with the stock of almost any European country as a prefix. They might have served well enough as "casuals," or even in the crews of transports, where the routine was machinelike and no great amount of smartness was required—and,

most of all, where danger was ever present; but Americans are out of place aboard a yacht, except as officers. They do not take kindly to private discipline. Their spirit of democracy gets in the way of smart service, and the restless initiative that makes them keenly efficient where there is plenty of action quickly corrodes in idleness.

I was not surprised that Mr. Grosvenor desired to get rid of this crowd. They were young and they were tough. Andersen himself confessed that they were getting more than he could handle.

"Dey ban all soldiers, zir. Dere ain't a zailor in de bunch; and now dey ban t'ink dey're passengers."

He went on to tell me that the yacht had come under power from San Juan, because five of the crew had been dismissed there for drunkenness and insubordination. The cook had also been dropped, so that Ito, the Japanese, had been acting as *chef* and steward.

"Dey would go crazy in a place like dis," said Andersen. "Rum und girls. It iss no good to sign on a crew in de States any more. When dey get where dey can drink wonce more, it iss de end."

He went on to tell me that Mr. Grosvenor had fitted out and sailed in a good deal of a hurry. Things had been so rushed in the final week that there was no time to pick and choose a proper crew. Hearing this, I could not help but wonder if there might not be some truth in the newspaper gossip about Grosvenor. Perhaps he had his own good reasons for getting out of the country quietly and in haste—not precisely in flight, but in the hope that whatever unpleasantness was pending might be deferred until his return.

He sent for me presently, and I went to his cabin, to find him not taking his siesta, but sitting at his desk, engaged in writing letters. It was cool enough with the awning rigged over the open skylight, a little air coming in through the portholes, and two electric fans buzzing; but Mr. Grosvenor's face was blotchy and congested, and his eyes held an anxious look.

"Carol wants to go ashore," said he, "and I'd rather not have her go alone. I've got to get these letters off to-morrow. Can't you show her the place?"

"Yes, sir, if you wish," I answered, considerably surprised at the request.

"Get a car and take her up to Absalon," said Mr. Grosvenor.

"You know the island, sir?" I asked, surprised.

"Used to, about a hundred years ago. Owned a sugar plantation that was covered up by Pelée, over by St. Pierre." His breath came quickly, as if the memory of this catastrophe was agitating. "Well, then, you take Carol to Absalon. I'll finish my letters and meet you at the hotel for dinner at seven thirty."

"Very well, sir," I answered.

I turned to leave, but he raised his hand with a detaining gesture, then glanced up at the skylight and lowered his voice.

"I say, Fairfax"—he beckoned me closer with a slight jerk of his head—"if she should want to sample the rum ashore, it's up to you stave it off. Tell her it won't do in this climate. Try to keep her mind interested. She was by way of getting the cocktail habit from that crazy bunch she's been trailing with at home. I just discovered it before leaving, and that's one reason I insisted on her coming along."

This was not very pleasant hearing, nor was the task outlined such as I had counted on. It was scarcely included in the duties of a sailing master, it seemed to me; but there was no help for it, especially as Mr. Grosvenor looked so ill that I did not want to make objections at that moment.

"I'll do the best I can," I promised.

"That's right, my boy," he answered, apparently relieved. "She's a good girl, Carol, but high-spirited, and, like most of her set at home, a bit demoralized by the general disorder of things. Being motherless is against her, of course, though for that matter a good many of the mothers are as bad as the daughters. Trot along, then, and meet me at the hotel at seven thirty. Spend about an hour at Absalon. It's a lovely spot, and the trip will keep her out of mischief."

Carol seemed pleased with this plan, which struck me as singular, to say the least. Still, a good many Americans of the Grosvenor class think nothing of sending a young daughter out with a chauffeur about whom they know little or nothing; so I supposed it was all right.

We got into the swift launch and landed at the jetty, about fifty yards from which was a file of public cars parked in the shade of the enormous trees that encircled the Savana. I took one that I had employed before, the driver and owner of which was a decent young fellow named Bosmiess.

I told Bosmiess to drive slowly, there being no sense in tearing through a new and interesting country at a kilometer a minute. Carol—for I might as well call her that first as last—had told me that this was her first visit to the real tropics, and I hoped that she would be interested to observe the novel atmosphere in detail; but at the end of the first few hundred yards of moderate speed she said impatiently:

"Are we going to a funeral, captain? Let him open her up a little. It makes a breeze."

Apparently Bosmiess understood, for he struck the pace habitual to motorists on Martinique, which is as fast as the car can go. There is a practical reason for this. The roads are all uphill and downhill, but at a continuous grade, like all big roads laid out by French engineers. In mounting, the driver can keep on the same speed by maintaining his pace, and in descending he has only to let the car roll as fast as safety permits. If one were to run out of gas on the road to St. Pierre, ten kilometers from Fort de France, one could coast all the way back to town.

We zoomed up through Didier, the residential colony, with its charming bungalows and villas, some five or six hundred feet above the town, overlooking it and the bay. Across a deep valley to the left the high hills rose into mountains, with jutting peaks on which heavy cumulus clouds were stranded. The terraces on either side were floral cascades, mostly pink and purple bougainvillea.

At a dominating point on the road, I told the driver to stop.

"Let's get out and look at the view," I said to Coral. "We might strike a shower on the way back."

"But there's not a cloud in sight," said she, evidently disinclined to move.

"That doesn't make much difference down here," I said. "It's apt to pour a deluge at any hour of the day or night. It comes down for about ten minutes like a cloudburst, then stops as suddenly as it began, and leaves a rainbow—or two, or six. That's what keeps everything so fresh and makes the place so healthy."

We got down. I could see that she was really impressed by the gorgeous view of mountains and sea, of the multicolored town, and of the roads where the ships lay.

"It's superb," said she, and moved close to my side. "Did you ever notice, captain,

that when you look at anything like this, you need somebody to see it with you? The yacht looks like an exquisite toy."

"That's about what she is," I said; "and my job is to wind her up, or set her sails and turn her rudder, and sail her around this blue basin that is the Caribbean, for your father's amusement and yours."

Carol laughed.

"Don't fool yourself into thinking you are going to get off as easy as that," said she. "Your menial position includes the care of this pampered child; and I think I'm going to need a lot in such a place as this."

Prophetic words, though at the moment they annoyed me—not the reference to my menial position, but because I did not greatly care for the prospect of playing duenna to a girl like this. Owing to Mr. Grosvenor's state of health, and what he had said to me about Carol's need of a monitor, it looked as if such a duty might devolve upon me too often.

We got back in the car and started off again. Carol moved over against me on the seat, and began to ask me questions about the island, its history and people, and the different trees and plants along the road. I was encouraged to see that she was actually beginning to take an interest in her surroundings, and so overlooked the fact that she was pressing closer than was necessary for audible conversational ease, the car being new and smooth-running.

Up we climbed, the air getting fresh and fine and sweet. A shower crashed down and passed, leaving in its wake the usual gorgeous rainbow to span the valley. The car was a good climber, so that every few minutes one could feel the lightening atmospheric pressure in one's eardrums.

Native women passed, swinging down with loads of breadfruit nicely balanced on their heads, their lithe hips swaying, their torsos erect and steady as the steeple of a church, their single garment the abbreviated *robe Josephine*—a syncopated Mother Hubbard, invariably of some barbaric color, an off shade of crimson or primrose. By the roadside was an unending profusion of flowers, the most insistent being the great flamboyants, or peacock flowers, sometimes nakedly arrayed, but more often blazing from the jungle like points of flame.

Carol nestled closer, but I did not think it was from coquetry. These natural beau-

ties were overwhelming her, the more so as it was her first experience of the tropics, and on the most beautiful island of all the Antilles, Greater or Lesser. Haiti runs her close for scenery—beats it, perhaps, in the lake region—but Martinique goes far ahead in the beauty and picturesqueness of her people.

"This place is apt to get into my blood, shipmate," Carol said presently. "Hasn't it got into yours?"

She gave me a searching look.

"It may, if I don't watch out," I answered ill-advisedly.

"Then for Heaven's sake, don't watch out! What's the good of being here?"

"Must beauty be lashed fast to personal feelings?" I asked.

"This beauty must. That's the reason I'm cuddling so close."

"Then if we were in bitter, gloomy surroundings, you'd be over on your side of the car?"

"N-no—in that case I'd be apt to need some cheering up."

"Then how about the mean between these two extremes?" I asked.

"There isn't any such thing for my sort any more," said Carol. "We live at *presto* or *lento*. We don't even get a glimpse of *moderato* as we go past in our express elevator, bound for the roof garden or the coal bunkers."

"Then you have to be hand-held and life-preserved wherever you happen to be?" I observed.

"'Fraid so, cappy. I'm a good deal of a pussy cat. I require to be cuddled. My system demands it; but you are not to think that I'm indiscriminate about the cuddler. I've gone for weeks and weeks without, and suffered accordingly, because there was no acceptable candidate for the office—or none that I cared to trust."

"You weren't on Martinique," I said. "This is a love island. The infection is in the air—floats around in the aroma of jasmine and stephanotis."

She shook her head.

"It's not altogether that."

"The long sea voyage—" I suggested.

"Nor that. It's mostly you, captain—your voice, your close-clipped way of speaking and moving, and your light, hard eyes. I wonder what white eyes would do to a woman! They arouse an irresistible desire to make them soften. I'm talking like a fool. I need a drink."

"You need a shaking," I said. "Don't count on getting any drinks when you are out with me."

She looked up at me, her eyes curiously intent.

"Do you really mean that?"

"I do. If you should overcome my resistance, I'd resign my billet that same day."

She did not answer. I told the driver to go ahead.

"Wait," said Carol, and raised her hand. "Listen!"

Up from the town, sweet and tuneful with distance, came the ringing of the cathedral chimes. At the hotel they roared and bellowed, but the bells were really good, and now their pealing was exquisite. It seemed to start harmonics in one's self, and to strike accord with all around, from the cloud-capped mountains to the roadside flowers.

"They are trying to remind me that I was born on Christmas Day," said Carol, and looked at me with misty eyes. "That's the reason for my name."

"Then let's try to keep it in mind."

"*Allons!*" she cried sharply to the driver. "Where do we go from here?"

"To a waterfall where there are some baths—Absalon."

"Oh, great! We're going to bathe?"

"Not to-day," I said. "Some time when your father's along."

She twisted about with a sudden flare of anger.

"When did you get like this?"

"About an hour ago, when we got aboard the launch. Look here, young lady, I'm not one of your New York boudoir beagles. I happen to be a Virginia gentleman with a few old-fashioned ideas and ideals. The fact that I'm a soldier of fortune, too, merely etches them in a little deeper."

"Dad's got me rum-rationed, but I'm allowed a drink at four o'clock," she replied a little sullenly.

"Honor bright?" I asked.

"Cross my heart and hope to die," she answered, mincingly.

I glanced at my watch. It was five minutes after four.

"All right, then. We're almost at Absalon, and you can have your drink."

Carol was silent after this little passage, but she did not relinquish the shock absorber that was myself. If anything, she pressed a little closer.

I may admit, too, that these same shocks were not entirely absorbed. To begin with, I had been a good deal astonished that a man as *comme il faut* as Grosvenor must have been should suggest that a personal stranger, and his new sailing master, should take his daughter for a motor ride unchaperoned, especially on Martinique. Since that love island was known to him of old, he must have been aware of its demoralizing qualities. Grosvenor did not know me at all, and he knew his daughter more or less, which made it even worse.

The only way I could account for it was that Carol had broken him to her habit of motoring about unchaperoned with young men of her class, and he saw fit to accept me as such. He had, in fact, said as much. It seemed possible, also, that as a keen judge of men himself, he had assayed me as the sort to take better care of a girl than a good many chaperons of her own sex. He knew the stock I sprang from, and its traditions, I thought, and had seen fit to appoint me squire as well as sailing master.

We turned off the St. Pierre road for Absalon, and reached it presently. As we got out of the car, I started to indicate the beauty of the place to Carol, but she cut me short.

"The licensed guide stuff can wait," she said impatiently. "I want that drink!"

There was a buvette of sorts just above the baths—merely a native cottage with a table or two in the living room, where a swarm of kids, both human and of the goat species, wove about, and the chickens, trim Leghorn hens, stepped daintily here and there in quest of crumbs.

Carol did not seem to mind. Glancing at her pretty, boyish face to see if her fastidiousness was offended, I caught a peculiar expression. Her eyes were eager and intent. They looked darker than usual, almost sapphire, and were slightly shadowed underneath. The nostrils of her cool little nose with its slight upward curve seemed dilated, and the usual pouting expression of her lips was ironed out, leaving them straight and a little compressed.

Taken altogether, I could not determine what her expression signified. There was passion of some sort in her face, and eagerness, and the hint of something that promised ill to the person who got between her and her objective.

We entered the *auberge*. As Carol seated herself at the table, I said:

"Now you can have your cocktail, but it will have to be made with Schiedam gin. There's a little drink war between France and England, and they've banned each other's booze."

"Well, that doesn't matter," said Carol, "so long as they've had sense enough to avoid the vain effort to ban their own. Tell him to bring me the makings."

I gave the order, and the patron, a veteran soldier with a fierce warlike beak, produced gin and French vermuth, with glasses and ice. Carol glanced up at me.

"Would you mind getting my beaded bag?" she said. "I left it in the car."

The chauffeur had walked down toward the baths. I found the bag on the seat, and went back and laid it on the table. Carol was in the act of measuring the cocktails, garnishing the rim of the glasses with slices of lime. She looked up at me and laughed.

"Wish my friends could see me doing this!" The tense look had gone from her face.

"This is me God-blessing Martinique. Here's to better understandings, skipper!"

She raised her glass. I did not like it, but I joined her. Then I frowned. The gin bottle had been removed by the patron, and it is not the custom on Martinique to snatch a bottle off the table when the client is served. I asked him sharply why he had done so.

"*Mam'selle* asked me to take it away," he answered.

Carol laughed, and a sudden flush spread across the upper half of her cheeks.

"Thought I'd better avoid temptation, skipper."

Of course I understood. Carol's leaving her bag in the car may or may not have been a ruse, but there was no doubt that she had taken advantage of my moment's absence to help herself surreptitiously to gin. I was tempted to order the bottle brought back, saying that my cocktail had too much vermuth, but immediately a better method flashed across my mind—one by which she could not accuse me of prying.

We drank our cocktails.

"How much?" I asked of the patron.

Before he could answer, Carol, who had opened her bag, offered him a dollar bill.

"Keep the change," said she in good French. "Buy some toys for the children."

The patron looked dubiously at the American bank note.

"He doesn't know that money," I said to Carol, and asked again: "How much?"

"Five francs, *m'sieu*."

"What?" I exclaimed, for this price was very excessive on Martinique, even with the rate of exchange at thirteen, making the two cocktails about thirty-eight cents.

"Don't be a piker, cappy!" Carol snapped, and rose. "Pay him what he asks, and let's go look at that waterfall."

"It's a matter of principle," I answered. Then, to the patron: "How five francs?"

He hesitated for an instant, and then, turning to a shelf, took down the gin bottle and mutely indicated its contents. He had opened a fresh bottle in our presence. Carol had evidently sneaked a thumping drink.

I glanced at her questioningly. She stared back with hard, defiant eyes, but the flush deepened on the upper part of her face.

"*Très bien*," I said, and gave the man five francs and a *pourboire*. "Now let's go look at the falls."

She stamped her foot.

"Oh, darn the falls! I see water enough at home. You've gone and spoiled my afternoon with your beastly censorship!"

"Sorry," I said; "but you are a very young girl, and your father has done me the honor to intrust me with your care."

A sudden thought appeared to strike her.

"Did he tell you to ride hard on my behavior?"

"Of course not," I answered. "If he had, I should have declined the responsibility. It's scarcely included in my official duties."

"Well, it's likely to be," she muttered. "Let's go."

The chauffeur had seen us and returned, so we started back to town. Carol had evidently lost interest in her shock absorber, for she sat closely against the side, holding to the arm rest; but only for about a kilometer. Then she slid over and hooked her arm through mine.

"Don't be cross, cappy! That was a rotten thing for me to do. I'm sorry; but I never could stand discipline. What do you really think of me?"

"That you are not to be trusted," I answered.

"I am about everything but booze, which is more than some of my set can say. I like men, and I'm a bit of a flirt, as you may possibly have discovered, but I'm good enough picker to play safe."

"Unless you cut out the alcohol, you're pretty sure to guess wrong some day," I said.

"No fear, cappy! I've got an instinct about men. Inherit it from dad, I guess."

"How do you feel?" I asked.

"Dreadfully hot and prickly. 'Fraid I took an overdose."

"Any dose is an overdose in this climate," I said. "Why do you do it, anyhow? You've got splendid vitality, and you're too young to have formed a habit. It's apt to spoil all your fun, to say nothing of your health and beauty."

"What was that last, cappy?" She turned a very flushed face up to me, and her lips, which were rather full and red and pouting, parted in a smile. "Did I hear aright? That's the first nice thing you've said since we started. You think I have beauty?"

"Of course you have; but you can't hope to keep it long unless you cut out the booze. It's a wicked, silly shame."

"There you go again!" Her voice was plaintive and a little thick. "Stop bristling like a—a sea urchin. Your first name's Thorne, isn't it? Thorne is almost right, but Brambles would be better. I think I'll call you Brambles. Gee, but I'm hot!"

"You'll be hotter when we strike the town," I said encouragingly. "Your face looks like a flamboyant. Better go aboard and have a bath."

"Not looking and feeling like this! That stuff must be stronger than our good old bootlegger's."

"It is," I said, "and you loaded it in bulk. We'll go through town and run out on the road to Casanovia. Don't want your dad to see you just yet. Much as my billet is worth."

"Wasn't your fault, Brambles dear. For one thing, I was bound to catch up a little; and for another, it's human nature, especially female human nature, to grab off forbidden fruit. Eve started it, and the rest of us have carried on. That's the reason the girls at home are all getting rummy."

"Let's not talk about it now," I said. "Have you enjoyed your voyage?"

"Not until to-day, and now I've gone and gummed up that. 'Gummed up' is right—I feel so hot and sticky. Dad insisted that I should come along, and the doctor told me that he had a fatty heart and a high blood pressure, and that a vio-

lent physical effort or sudden strong mental emotion might be fatal; so I came to try to head off those things."

"Good for you!" I said.

"It's not been good for me, though. I've been cooped up, which is bad enough, and my drinks rationed, which is worse. Both together are intolerable. If dad were to drop dead, and I to find myself heiress to several million dollars, there's no telling what might happen. It's bad enough now, with all the men trying to marry me or something, while I'm afraid to choose because I can't be sure which is the real attraction, Carol or Carol's dough. And I want to be married."

It struck me that the Schiedam was beginning to get in its mental as well as physical reactions.

"Who do you want to be married to?" I asked.

"Well," said Carol, "if I had to choose right off the bat, I think the handkerchief would land on you, Brambles."

She looked up at me with a smile that was marred by the congestion of her cheeks and the vague look in her blue eyes.

"Thanks!" I said. "I might not stick at marrying an heiress, but I certainly should at marrying one who was also a rummy."

She gave a reckless laugh.

"I shouldn't be that long if I were married to you, old sweetie! For one thing, I don't think I'd want to; and for another, I wouldn't be let."

"Yet you say that last is the cause of all the trouble," I reminded her.

"Well, it makes a difference who's the excise officer."

She lurched forward, and I drew her back against me, with an inward sigh. Carol must have heard it, for she said drowsily:

"Don't you think you—you—might like to marry me, B-b-brambles, if I cut it out—quit the stuff cold?"

Her head fell back against my shoulder. Her bright, fine hair, loosened by the jolting of the car, eddied in wisps across my face. I gave her a little shake, for there was a car coming.

"Carol!" I said. "Carol, brace up! Here comes somebody."

"L-l-let 'em come!"

"Carol!"

Her deep, slightly stertorous breathing was all the response I got. I reached up

and dropped the curtain beside me—and just in time, for as the approaching car whirled past I caught a glimpse of Mr. Grosvenor, cigar in mouth, leaning back against the cushions.

IV

So here was a nice job for the new sailing master—careering around Martinique with his owner's drunken young daughter mostly in his lap—steady her golden head against the jolting of the car!

The worst of it was that I had no idea how long this syncope might last. I could not very well seek medical or other aid without the risk of scandal. Benton had told me that Fort de France was as bad as a New England village—or, worse yet, a French one—for gossip. It would be all over the place in no time.

I decided, therefore, that the only thing to do was to keep on going, in the hope that the cool air might blow the cobwebs away; so I told the driver to pass through the town and continue on the road past Bellevue and Fond Nigaud and Casanovia.

Scarcely had I done so when another complication was presented. We came upon a big touring car apparently *en panne* with motor trouble, for it was drawn to the side of the road with the hood up and a yellow chauffeur in white livery and gaiters trying, as it seemed, to diagnose the cause of the paralysis. On Martinique it is regarded as the height of swinishness—almost a crime, in fact—to pass a car in trouble without an offer of assistance. In obedience to this unwritten law, our driver slowed. Then, getting no word or signal to proceed, he came to a stop, breasting over to the side of the road behind the other car.

As we passed, I received a powerful galvanic shock, for I had discovered on the back seat a big, swarthy man, immaculately dressed, and beside him a girl who, I felt convinced, could be none other than Jasmine.

My driver looked back.

"Go and see if they need help," I said.

Carol stirred in my arms, partly roused by the cessation of movement. I was afraid she might regain consciousness suddenly, and try to get out and talk, if I left her. Flushed, incoherent, with disheveled hair tumbling about her ears, this would not do at all. The story would be bandied all about Fort de France, how the American

who had been waiting there ten days to assume command of the magnificent yacht belonging to a millionaire compatriot had taken the young daughter of his patron for a *promenade en auto* and brought her back disgracefully bemused.

The thought of it turned me cold, despite the heat. I had no misgivings about Bosmiess, my chauffeur, whom I had employed before, and whom I knew to be a quiet, steady fellow. He was, in fact, our best witness of correct behavior; and I meant to tell him, before leaving, that in my momentary absence *mademoiselle*, through an indiscretion of ignorance, had taken a drink which had suddenly gone to her head, she being very thirsty and unused to spirits.

The chauffeur got down and went to the other car, so here was I by the mockery of circumstance compelled to sit there holding Carol, while Jasmine, whom I was longing to see closely in the flesh, was not twenty feet behind us in another car. For the moment I was tempted to lay my charge gently on the seat, and get out; but she was beginning to show signs of animation, so that I did not dare.

Bosmiess, a skilled mechanic, came back and said:

"A *panne* of electricity, *m'sieur*. He has burned out the *vis platine* of his magneto. French cars are geared too high for our steep ascents, and have to climb on low speed."

"Can't he run on his batteries?" I asked.

"They are too weak, *m'sieur*. I have a spare for his magneto, which is the same as mine. It will not take ten minutes to adjust it."

He was right. Unluckily, the job completed, French courtesy required that the occupants of the other car should thank me in person, and make their excuses for the delay to which I had been subjected. I had feared something of the sort. On hearing the thrum of their motor, I glanced back through the colloid and saw them getting down—both the man and Jasmine, he impelled by courteous obligation, and she, no doubt, through curiosity.

I straightened up and gave Carol a vicious little shake.

"Carol!" I said. "Wake up, quick!"

As often happens when one is in this sort of a panic, it was immediately apparent that I had done precisely the wrong thing. I discovered the error in time to prop her

in the corner and to slip out of the car before the pair had come alongside of it. The man bowed politely, and began to express his thanks and apologies in fluent French of perfect diction, but with a slightly foreign accent. He was South American, I thought—Argentine or Brazilian or Venezuelan. He was a handsome man of about fifty, powerful of physique, clear-skinned, with good features, and with something about him that suggested the man accustomed to command and to receive prompt obedience.

I murmured something perfunctory about my pleasure at being able to render service, and about the inconsequence of the slight delay. While doing so, I glanced once or twice at Jasmine, who was standing at his elbow, looking at me with a puzzled frown.

There could be no doubt at all that she was the original of the portrait, though far more lovely. There are many pretty women who cannot claim actual beauty, and many beauties whom one would scarcely think of calling pretty, but my first swift glance showed me that this girl possessed both qualities in full. Her face was oval, with features that were softly exquisite. Something about her nose and her deep violet eyes reminded me of Carol.

She would be, I thought, about twenty-four—getting on, for an unmarried Martiniquaise. Glancing at her hand, ungloved in that hot climate, I saw that she wore no rings at all. She was also very simply dressed, while her cavalier was hung with jewels wherever excuse offered.

Of course, he did not offer any introduction of himself or his companion; but he continued to perorate in a resonant voice, like one accustomed to making speeches and enjoying his own noise. Then, to my dismay, Jasmine moved past us and stepped to the side of the car. She may have caught a glimpse of a feminine gown as we moved slowly past, and may have desired to say a word of thanks to my companion.

Half turning, I watched her in fascinated horror. She stood there only an instant, but long enough for me to catch the contraction of her brows and what suggested an almost imperceptible lifting of a small, straight nose already tilted at the tip. Then, turning suddenly, she moved back to their car, of which the motor was purring softly. Passing me without a glance, and with her small, aristocratic head held stiffly, she stepped up to take her seat.

I could feel the hot blood surging up into my face. The man, still talking to me, concluded his renewed assurance of a distinguished and grateful consideration, and bowed ceremoniously. I returned his salute, and we parted.

I got into the car and collected Carol again, gently, but with the desire to give her a sound shaking. Bosmiess got aboard and started the motor.

"Who were those people?" I asked.

"I do not know, *m'sieur*. I have seen the lady several times, and I think she lives over by St. Pierre. I have also seen the gentleman, but he is not of Martinique."

"It is unfortunate," I said, "that she should have seen Mlle. Grosvenor. *Mademoiselle* was very hot and thirsty, and drank a punch when I stepped out to get her bag from the car. Being unaccustomed to spirits and to the heat, it appears to have overcome her."

"That frequently happens in the case of strangers, *m'sieur*. Our rum is stronger than the beverages to which they are accustomed."

"If you should hear any gossip," I said, "I count on you to contradict it."

"Of course, *m'sieur*," said Bosmiess.

We started off. At the very first lurch Carol sat suddenly upright, raised her hands to her tumbled hair, and stared at me with an expression of dismay.

"My goodness!" said she. "I must have passed away."

"Call it heat stroke," I answered.

"How do you feel?"

"Nothing to brag of. Where are we?"

"Getting close to Didier," I said, inwardly cursing the rotten luck that brought about her recovery when the car stopped, instead of when it started. "You certainly have swift recuperative powers."

"Well, it was taking that strong stuff at a gulp, and the motion of the car that churned it up, and the first sweet, cool air that I've had for weeks. It made me suddenly drowsy, especially as I haven't been sleeping well aboard the yacht."

"Do you remember all the nonsense you were talking before you suddenly went dodo?" I asked.

"Vaguely. I remember calling you 'Brambles,' and I have a hazy notion that I suggested our getting married."

She laughed.

"Is that your usual habit when partially anesthetized?" I asked.

and dropped the curtain beside me—and just in time, for as the approaching car whirled past I caught a glimpse of Mr. Grosvenor, cigar in mouth, leaning back against the cushions.

IV

So here was a nice job for the new sailing master—careering around Martinique with his owner's drunken young daughter mostly in his lap—steady her golden head against the jolting of the car!

The worst of it was that I had no idea how long this syncope might last. I could not very well seek medical or other aid without the risk of scandal. Benton had told me that Fort de France was as bad as a New England village—or, worse yet, a French one—for gossip. It would be all over the place in no time.

I decided, therefore, that the only thing to do was to keep on going, in the hope that the cool air might blow the cobwebs away; so I told the driver to pass through the town and continue on the road past Bellevue and Fond Nigaud and Casanovia.

Scarcely had I done so when another complication was presented. We came upon a big touring car apparently *en panne* with motor trouble, for it was drawn to the side of the road with the hood up and a yellow chauffeur in white livery and gaiters trying, as it seemed, to diagnose the cause of the paralysis. On Martinique it is regarded as the height of swinishness—almost a crime, in fact—to pass a car in trouble without an offer of assistance. In obedience to this unwritten law, our driver slowed. Then, getting no word or signal to proceed, he came to a stop, breasting over to the side of the road behind the other car.

As we passed, I received a powerful galvanic shock, for I had discovered on the back seat a big, swarthy man, immaculately dressed, and beside him a girl who, I felt convinced, could be none other than Jasmine.

My driver looked back.

"Go and see if they need help," I said.

Carol stirred in my arms, partly roused by the cessation of movement. I was afraid she might regain consciousness suddenly, and try to get out and talk, if I left her. Flushed, incoherent, with disheveled hair tumbling about her ears, this would not do at all. The story would be bandied all about Fort de France, how the American

who had been waiting there ten days to assume command of the magnificent yacht belonging to a millionaire compatriot had taken the young daughter of his patron for a *promenade en auto* and brought her back disgracefully bemused.

The thought of it turned me cold, despite the heat. I had no misgivings about Bosmiess, my chauffeur, whom I had employed before, and whom I knew to be a quiet, steady fellow. He was, in fact, our best witness of correct behavior; and I meant to tell him, before leaving, that in my momentary absence *mademoiselle*, through an indiscretion of ignorance, had taken a drink which had suddenly gone to her head, she being very thirsty and unused to spirits.

The chauffeur got down and went to the other car, so here was I by the mockery of circumstance compelled to sit there holding Carol, while Jasmine, whom I was longing to see closely in the flesh, was not twenty feet behind us in another car. For the moment I was tempted to lay my charge gently on the seat, and get out; but she was beginning to show signs of animation, so that I did not dare.

Bosmiess, a skilled mechanic, came back and said:

"A *panne* of electricity, *m'sieur*. He has burned out the *vis platine* of his magneto. French cars are geared too high for our steep ascents, and have to climb on low speed."

"Can't he run on his batteries?" I asked.

"They are too weak, *m'sieur*. I have a spare for his magneto, which is the same as mine. It will not take ten minutes to adjust it."

He was right. Unluckily, the job completed, French courtesy required that the occupants of the other car should thank me in person, and make their excuses for the delay to which I had been subjected. I had feared something of the sort. On hearing the thrum of their motor, I glanced back through the colloid and saw them getting down—both the man and Jasmine, he impelled by courteous obligation, and she, no doubt, through curiosity.

I straightened up and gave Carol a vicious little shake.

"Carol!" I said. "Wake up, quick!"

As often happens when one is in this sort of a panic, it was immediately apparent that I had done precisely the wrong thing. I discovered the error in time to prop her

in the corner and to slip out of the car before the pair had come alongside of it. The man bowed politely, and began to express his thanks and apologies in fluent French of perfect diction, but with a slightly foreign accent. He was South American, I thought—Argentine or Brazilian or Venezuelan. He was a handsome man of about fifty, powerful of physique, clear-skinned, with good features, and with something about him that suggested the man accustomed to command and to receive prompt obedience.

I murmured something perfunctory about my pleasure at being able to render service, and about the inconsequence of the slight delay. While doing so, I glanced once or twice at Jasmine, who was standing at his elbow, looking at me with a puzzled frown.

There could be no doubt at all that she was the original of the portrait, though far more lovely. There are many pretty women who cannot claim actual beauty, and many beauties whom one would scarcely think of calling pretty, but my first swift glance showed me that this girl possessed both qualities in full. Her face was oval, with features that were softly exquisite. Something about her nose and her deep violet eyes reminded me of Carol.

She would be, I thought, about twenty-four—getting on, for an unmarried Martiniquaise. Glancing at her hand, ungloved in that hot climate, I saw that she wore no rings at all. She was also very simply dressed, while her cavalier was hung with jewels wherever excuse offered.

Of course, he did not offer any introduction of himself or his companion; but he continued to perorate in a resonant voice, like one accustomed to making speeches and enjoying his own noise. Then, to my dismay, Jasmine moved past us and stepped to the side of the car. She may have caught a glimpse of a feminine gown as we moved slowly past, and may have desired to say a word of thanks to my companion.

Half turning, I watched her in fascinated horror. She stood there only an instant, but long enough for me to catch the contraction of her brows and what suggested an almost imperceptible lifting of a small, straight nose already tilted at the tip. Then, turning suddenly, she moved back to their car, of which the motor was purring softly. Passing me without a glance, and with her small, aristocratic head held stiffly, she stepped up to take her seat.

I could feel the hot blood surging up into my face. The man, still talking to me, concluded his renewed assurance of a distinguished and grateful consideration, and bowed ceremoniously. I returned his salute, and we parted.

I got into the car and collected Carol again, gently, but with the desire to give her a sound shaking. Bosmiess got aboard and started the motor.

"Who were those people?" I asked.

"I do not know, *m'sieur*. I have seen the lady several times, and I think she lives over by St. Pierre. I have also seen the gentleman, but he is not of Martinique."

"It is unfortunate," I said, "that she should have seen Mlle. Grosvenor. *Mademoiselle* was very hot and thirsty, and drank a punch when I stepped out to get her bag from the car. Being unaccustomed to spirits and to the heat, it appears to have overcome her."

"That frequently happens in the case of strangers, *m'sieur*. Our rum is stronger than the beverages to which they are accustomed."

"If you should hear any gossip," I said, "I count on you to contradict it."

"Of course, *m'sieur*," said Bosmiess.

We started off. At the very first lurch Carol sat suddenly upright, raised her hands to her tumbled hair, and stared at me with an expression of dismay.

"My goodness!" said she. "I must have passed away."

"Call it heat stroke," I answered.

"How do you feel?"

"Nothing to brag of. Where are we?"

"Getting close to Didier," I said, inwardly cursing the rotten luck that brought about her recovery when the car stopped, instead of when it started. "You certainly have swift recuperative powers."

"Well, it was taking that strong stuff at a gulp, and the motion of the car that churned it up, and the first sweet, cool air that I've had for weeks. It made me suddenly drowsy, especially as I haven't been sleeping well aboard the yacht."

"Do you remember all the nonsense you were talking before you suddenly went dodo?" I asked.

"Vaguely. I remember calling you 'Brambles,' and I have a hazy notion that I suggested our getting married."

She laughed.

"Is that your usual habit when partially anaesthetized?" I asked.

"Don't be horrid, Brambles! I never proposed to anybody before, but several times it has been the other way round. That's probably one reason dad dragged me along. He was afraid he might come home and find me joined in holy wedlock to a fireman, or bicycle cop, or something. I've always had a weakness for men of action."

"No matter what sort?"

She flashed me an angry look.

"Why do you persist in being nasty?"

It is only that men whose occupations require quick thought and courage and physical force have always made an appeal to me, and that office and dancing men and pleasure hounds do not. If I'd been old enough to nurse in France during the war, I'd not be a lonely spinster now!"

"Wonder you haven't got married or engaged to some overseas soldier," I said.

"Well, you see, Brambles, I'd have had to be there when he was doing it. The mere record of noble deeds leaves me cold. I'm temperamental, I suppose. I'm more apt to be moved by some actor whom I know to be a perfect fraud playing some heroic rôle on the stage or screen than by the real thing who has done it and come home and got into his swivel chair again. It's all wrong, of course, but it's so."

I nodded. It had been brought painfully home to me, when job hunting, that Carol was far from being an exception to the general sentiment toward men of tried service.

She rearranged her hair with quick, deft touches, produced a vanity outfit from her bag, powdered her nose, policed her face, which had now resumed its normal tint, gave a few skilled but superfluous touches to lips and cheeks, and smoothed out her crumpled dress—a white silk jersey.

"After what's happened, the best thing we can do is to stroll about the Savana and establish an alibi."

Carol shot me a curious look.

"After what's happened?"

"We stopped to give first aid to a car *en panne*," I said, "and an inquisitive young woman gave you the once over."

"Well, what of it? Can't I take a nap? Who was she?"

"Our driver doesn't know, neither do I; and you looked a little blurred."

"She should worry!" said Carol indifferently. "Since you're such a stickler, we'll do as you say. We'll walk around a little, then meet dad at the hotel."

"Your honored parent passed us tearing up grade at about fifty an hour just as we struck the main pike," I said. "It has been puzzling me a little, because he knew we were going to Absalon. He must have guessed that we might be in that car, but he never gave us so much as a glance. I've been wondering what was the idea, also thanking Heaven that he had some such idea."

Carol reflected for a moment.

"Do you know, Brambles, what you've just told me fits in with a sort of hazy suspicion of mine? For some time I've had a curious hunch that dad's wanting to come here to Martinique is not entirely casual. There's some motive behind it."

"Business?" I asked.

"No. He closed up all of his business affairs about a year ago, saying that he was through with money making. Years and years ago he owned a sugar and coffee plantation over by St. Pierre. It was destroyed by the eruption of Pelée, but it had already given him his start. In fact, he had sailed for home a day or two before the catastrophe. Brambles"—she leaned toward me, laying her hand on my arm—"I wonder if he could have left some old score unsettled!"

"I don't believe so," I answered. "Your father strikes me as the sort of man to settle his shot as he goes along."

"Well, then he strikes you right; but there are some scores that you can't always settle as you go along."

"He's had time enough since. How long has he been a very rich man?"

"As far back as I can remember; but then he inherited a pretty big estate from his father. Now why should he want to stick on here indefinitely? When I asked him how long we were to stay, he gave me a vague answer—said that he was tired of sailing around, that this was the most beautiful island of the West Indies, and that he hated British colonies, like Barbados and Trinidad, with all their swank and lack of vivid local color."

"Do you like it here?" I asked.

Carol laughed.

"Well, I've had rather a bad start, but I think I might, if you're going to be nice to me."

"I shall as long as you behave yourself," I answered. "But it's a far cry from what I signed on for, this playing nurse to a spoiled and willful girl child."

"I'll be good. I've had my little lesson—and I've got a most consuming thirst." Then, seeing the expression on my face, she laughed. "No—for something wet and cold and harmless."

"'Fraid we'll have to go out aboard to get it," I said. "There's no place ashore where I'd care to take you unchaperoned. Why the deuce didn't you bring a companion or something?"

"Didn't want her. Neither did dad. He's an awful old misogynist—hates all women but me, especially aboard ship. Says they invariably start something, whether they want to or not. I've had a sketchy social education, Brambles, but so far nothing's broken or even bent. I've profited by a few terrible examples."

We dipped into the town at full tilt, of course. The horn, blaring its horrid threat, flushed the multicolored native crowd that thronged the street a good deal as flying fish spatter out under the bows of a swift ship.

"I don't want to go out aboard," said Carol. "Can't we sit in the car and have a cold drink served us?"

There seemed no objection to this, so I had Bosmiess stop at one of the kiosk cafés on the Savana, and ordered a citronade with a dash of grenadine. Carol drank it thirstily. It was about six o'clock, and would soon be dark, so I suggested to Carol that she should go aboard the yacht and rest and bathe before dinner. She looked very badly. Her face, from being heavily flushed, had suddenly become pale, with dark shadows under the eyes, and I noticed that her hand trembled as she sipped the cold, sweet beverage.

"How do you feel now?" I asked.

"Pretty awful, thanks," she answered, with a feeble smile. "Faint and shaky, and I've got a splitting headache. It's not entirely my fault, Brambles. I'm beginning to get the reaction of a long spell of constant anxiety. I've been more worried about dad than I realized."

"He looks pretty strong to me," I said. She shook her head.

"He's not, though. The sea agrees with him, and his ruddy color is deceptive. I'm upset at what you tell me of his having passed us back there on the road. He's up to something, and there's no telling what might happen if he were to get any sort of shock. I want to know just as soon as he gets back."

"Suppose we drive slowly to meet him," I suggested. "There's only the one road."

"No—my head is still swimming, and the motion would make it worse. We might get out of the car and walk around a little, though."

"Better keep perfectly still," I advised. "Let's move down there under the trees and sit in the car and wait. Your father will have to pass this way."

I spoke to Bosmiess, and we shifted our berth and came to a stop at an inconspicuous place on the side of the Savana. As it was only a step to the hotel, and we had no further use for the car except to sit in it and wait, I told Bosmiess that if he had anything to do he need not remain.

"I shall want you every day," said Carol, as I paid him.

Delighted at this prospect of a steady engagement, Bosmiess assured us that he would hold his car in reserve. With a respectful salute, he moved off.

For several minutes we sat there, talking quietly and watching the passers-by. Carol's mind was still occupied by her solicitude about her father.

"There is something underneath it, Brambles," said she. "I heard him tell you to take me out to Absalon, saying that he had to write a lot of letters to get off by to-morrow's mail. He counted on our being there about an hour; and no sooner have we gone than he comes ashore himself, gets into a car, and tears off on the road to St. Pierre."

I nodded. Mr. Grosvenor must indeed have left immediately after ourselves. We had not lingered more than ten minutes at Absalon, with another ten, perhaps, to the forking of the roads. He had not counted on our returning so quickly; and I was sure that he had tried to avoid our seeing him as we passed each other.

"I don't like it one little bit," said Carol. "The doctors forbade his motoring at all, except for short distances and at a very slow pace; and now he goes tearing up over that scenic railway of a road at about fifty an hour, you say, where you climb so fast your eardrums crackle. The sudden change of altitude alone is bad enough, as he was particularly warned against going up from sea level. It's the very worst thing for a rickety heart."

This, of course, was perfectly true.

"And the worst of all," Carol continued, "is this—what could have been his object?"

He wouldn't do such a thing unless there was some urgent reason."

Seeing that she was working herself into a state of nervous excitement, I tried to reassure her, and to get her mind on other things. Then, as if to help me, I caught sight of Benton walking down a side street. He turned a corner and disappeared.

"There's our vice consul, and a fine chap," I said. "I'll get him and bring him over. He'll cheer you up."

I jumped out of the car and started after Benton. He was about a hundred yards away, just turning a corner. Apparently he had ducked into some shop, for he was not in sight when I reached the next street. I looked into one or two places, and presently found him in a music store, examining some operatic scores.

"Let that wait," I said. "Come with me and meet an American beauty."

"Miss Grosvenor?" His face lighted. "I caught a glimpse of her when you started for your ride."

"The same," I said. "Just the girl for you. Here's the chance of a lifetime!"

He gave his merry laugh.

"You're generous, to say the least of it, Fairfax."

"Not a marrying man," I answered; "nor yet a dog in the manger."

He glanced at his handsome reflection in the glass.

"Guess I'll pass muster," said he. "Where is she?"

"Back in the car, by the Savana."

We went out and turned in that direction. The car was hidden from sight by a file of taxis at their station, so that it was not until we had almost reached it that I discovered it to be empty.

Fetching up with a most disagreeable sensation of the diaphragm, I looked all about, but saw nothing of Carol. I accosted a well dressed old gentleman, slightly colored, whom I remembered that I had seen sitting on a bench near by.

"Pardon, *m'sieur*, but did you happen to see in what direction the young lady went who was in this car?" I asked.

"*Parfaitement, m'sieur*," he answered politely. "She got out and walked across the Savana toward the statue of Josephine."

I thanked him and gave a sigh of relief. We started toward the statue, which stands in the middle of the Savana, encircled by lofty royal palms. We reached it and saw no sign of Carol.

"Darn it!" I exclaimed, vexed and unaccountably disturbed. "Couldn't she have waited five minutes?"

Benton smiled.

"Nothing could happen to her here. She just wants to pay you off for making her wait."

We cruised aimlessly about. Carol had disappeared as if the earth had swallowed her. It was now almost dark. People whom we questioned gave us no more than vague, uncertain answers; and Carol was a conspicuous personality in such a place.

Finally a Lycée student, sitting at a table in a kiosk, told us that he was quite sure he had seen such a young lady as we described getting into a covered car with another lady. The car had immediately moved off, turning down a side street, he thought.

"Do you remember what sort of hat she wore?" I asked, nearly wild with anxiety.

"I could not see her hat, *monsieur*, but it seems to me there was a dark veil drawn back around it."

"That's she," I groaned to Benton. "What the devil has happened now?"

V

THE young student—who, by the way, had lost his left leg in the war—was unable to give us much further information. The car had drawn up some distance from the kiosk where he was sitting, with its back to him, so that he was unable to identify its make. As the two ladies had got into the rear seat, there was evidently a driver. It had been slowly moving ahead when brought to a stop, as if its passenger had discovered an acquaintance, or had been waiting for her companion to join her.

"Could you describe this lady?" Benton asked.

"Not precisely, M. Benton." Like everybody else, the student knew Benton by sight. "She got out of the car and walked to meet the other lady, and they exchanged a few words; but the light was poor, and my eyes are not of the best." He shook his head doubtfully. "If I were to hazard a description, I should say that she was a lady of a certain age, and of an *embonpoint*."

This description, of course, did not fit in at all with my suspicions, as for some reason, not as yet crystallized, I associated the car we had assisted on the road with this outrageous act of Carol's. I no longer

thought it a caprice; there was something more serious in the background.

"Let's go back to the car," I said to Benton. "There's something here that is going to take a lot of working out. This girl may be spoiled, but she's not such a fool as to do a thing like this merely to upset me."

So back we went across the Savana, a meadow of about five or six acres. When we were seated in the car, I told him in detail all that had happened that afternoon. He reflected for a moment.

"It seems to me there's only one explanation," he said. "Something must have happened to Mr. Grosvenor, and he sent a hurry call for his daughter. He might have had an accident; or perhaps, as you say his heart was rickety, he's had some sort of collapse, due to the jolting and the sudden change of altitude. He might have asked the people in the first car that came along to look around for his daughter and bring her to him as quickly as possible."

"She knew that I was coming right back," I objected. "She might have waited five minutes."

"But you say that you had dismissed Bosmiess," Benton reminded me. "The call may have been so urgent that she felt she couldn't afford the time lost in hunting him up. It's pretty rough on you, but in a case like that a girl would scarcely be likely to think of anything but getting to her father as quickly as she could."

There seemed to be no other explanation. If Mr. Grosvenor had suffered an accident or a heart seizure, every moment would naturally be precious.

"It's got to be that," said Benton decidedly. "It couldn't possibly be anything else. People don't kidnap girls on Martinique. They could scarcely get away with it, even if they wanted to make the attempt. The best thing we can do is to get hold of Bosmiess and run back over the road to St. Pierre, inquiring about the other car as we go along."

So we followed out this plan. Benton sent a couple of scouts from the public automobile stand to find Bosmiess, and in about fifteen minutes he came hurrying back. We started off; but on striking the one and only road, and halting to question a number of people sitting outside their houses on the roadside, we failed to get any report at all of the other car. Some of these folk told us that such a car as we de-

scribed had passed half an hour before, running to the town, but they were certain that it had not returned, as they could not have helped but observe it.

When a mounted gendarme patrolling the road gave us the same assurance, we looked at each other in dismay.

"Well, then," said Benton, "the only thing for us to do is to learn if they have gone the other way—on the road to Casanovia. If they have, then our theory is no good, and there's something else behind it all."

We turned around, went back through the town, and, pausing at the bridge beyond it, learned from an *agent de police* that the automobile described had indeed passed that way. He could not give us information about its occupants, because a shower was coming up, and the side curtains had been dropped. The shower had come, in fact, while we were talking to the student, crashing down in the torrential way peculiar to the place.

By this time it was seven o'clock.

"We'd better go back to the hotel," said Benton. "If I'm all wrong, and Mr. Grosvenor arrives, we'll simply have to tell him what has happened and see if he can throw any light on the business."

I had told him of Carol's vague suspicion that her father had some secret mission on Martinique, and of his residence there some twenty years before. I now mentioned also what the doctors had told her about the danger of his being subjected to any emotional shock.

"Don't see any help for it," said Benton. "He's bound to know about it, so we'll just have to take the chance."

We drove back to the hotel. They told us at the desk that Mr. Grosvenor had arrived, and was waiting for us on the terrace. I was horribly nervous, of course, and I asked Benton to come with me.

We went upstairs and out on the terrace, where we found Mr. Grosvenor sitting on a bench with the "makings" of a punch on the table in front of him. He looked very ill in the glare of the electric lights, his face mottled, his features sagging, and there was a droop to his big shoulders as if from fatigue. As he glanced up at us, it seemed to me that there was a frightened look in his eyes.

"Where's Carol?" he asked a little thickly.

"Mr. Grosvenor," I said, "please try to

brace yourself for a bit of a shock—nothing serious, but very puzzling.”

He straightened up with a jerk, and the mottled red gave way to an ashen pallor.

“Eh? What’s that? Where’s Carol?”

“I left her for a few minutes in the car by the Savana—”

“Why?” he demanded, staring at me with a wild expression. “Never mind—what then?”

“When I came back, she had gone. We learned that for some reason she had accepted an invitation to take a turn with a lady in a touring car.”

The effect of this speech was alarming. The blood surged up into his face, empurpling it. His eyes seemed thrust out by the pressure.

“You—you—oh, my God!”

He sprang suddenly upright with a sort of bound, gasped, clutched at his throat, and collapsed upon the bench. He might have fallen and struck his head on the cement floor if Benton had not sprung forward and caught him.

I raised his feet and seated myself, taking his head in my lap. He was unconscious and breathing stertorously, his face congested. I tore off his collar and loosened the neck band of his shirt. Then I looked up hopelessly at Benton. The clouds had opened again, and their contents were crashing down on the corrugated iron roof.

“Well,” I said wretchedly, “the blow has fallen. He’s got a stroke.”

“Stay just as you are,” said Benton quietly. “Don’t try to move him until I get Dr. Morry.”

He hurried off. I sat there miserably, bathing the turgid features of the stricken man with my handkerchief dipped in the bowl of ice. Demosthène, the *garçon*, came out and gave us a startled look.

“*M’sieur* has had a seizure,” I said. “Mr. Benton has gone to get the doctor.”

Several of the guests came out on the terrace while I waited. At my brief word of explanation they quietly withdrew, with the innate courtesy of the French. Then Benton arrived with the doctor, a skilled and pleasant-spoken man who had served through the war. He made a swift examination of the patient.

“*Une apoplexie, m’sieur*,” said he; “but not, I hope, fatal. His heart action is fairly good, though the organ is diseased. We had better put him to bed, and I shall do what is necessary.”

I asked if the patient was likely to be unconscious long.

“Impossible to say, *m’sieur*. Such attacks in a man of his age are apt to be followed by some paralysis—”

“Of speech?” I asked eagerly.

“That is likely to happen. We can only wait and see.”

He touched the bell, when Demosthène appeared. The four of us carried the big man into a large room, hastily prepared, and put him to bed. Then, leaving the doctor with Demosthène and a maid to get what he might require, Benton and I went out on the terrace.

“Pretty bad,” said Benton; “but we’ve got other things to think of now that this possible source of information has been cut off indefinitely. There’s something behind it all—some mystery, which he might have been able to explain.”

I nodded.

“You saw how terrified he looked when I told him that Carol had disappeared?”

“Yes. He had some reason to be frightened. He’s got some dangerous enemy here on Martinique. If Carol fails to show up within the next hour, we’ll say that she’s been kidnaped. Anyhow, I’m going to report the case to the *commissaire de police*. He’s quite a friend of mine, and keen as a whip. You wait here to break it to Carol if she should return. We’ll find her, no fear!”

A good deal comforted by Benton’s quick resource and assurance, I went up to my room. Sitting there in the uproar of the rain, I presently managed to get my thoughts into some sort of order.

The more I studied the beastly business, the stronger my conviction grew that in some way Jasmine was mixed up in it. Of course, that lovely girl came far from filling the description given by the student of the woman who had enticed Carol away; but a new idea occurred to me.

While I was talking to her escort, Jasmine had stepped to the side of our car, and had seen Carol slumped down on the seat, disheveled and unconscious. She had taken one glance, put her nose in the air, and walked back to her own car without a word. This, it struck me, was very far from the action that a woman would naturally have taken, especially on Martinique.

Jasmine had no reason to suppose that Carol had been injudicious in the matter of spirits. Seeing her in such a state, almost

any woman would have been moved by an immediate impulse to render some assistance, to learn what was the matter, thinking that she was ill or in physical distress. It was not a situation to be ignored or treated with the cool contempt accorded it by Jasmine.

Thinking back, it struck me that there had been an expression almost of hatred on her face. There had to be something to account for this—some potent *raison d'être*. News travels swiftly on Martinique, an island rarely visited by yachts like the Integrity—or by any tourists, for that matter, except those making the voyage of the Windward Islands and landing for the few hours required to discharge or take aboard freight or passengers and mails.

The chances were more than even that Jasmine knew of the arrival of the Grosvenors, and their name. The yacht was a conspicuous object from the Savana, where little clusters of people gathered to admire her. Even my modest self had been quickly identified, and my position known. It is always so in isolated communities.

Then what in Heaven's name, I demanded, could be the idea? Nobody could hope to kidnap an American girl on such a small island and get away with it. It seemed to me that were a public alarm to be sent out, and a reward offered, there must be news of Carol within twenty-four hours.

Of course, there was the possibility that she might be smuggled aboard some small vessel and taken to some other place; but where could they take her? It would be the same on the neighboring islands as on this one; and it seemed to me that nobody would dare to demand a ransom.

The idea of foul play was practically out of the question, as was also that of Carol's being so wickedly foolish as to wish to give us all a scare. She knew the danger of such folly.

I went down presently to ask news of Mr. Grosvenor, and met Benton with the *commissaire*, or chief of police. The latter was a brown man, alert, keen of features, with penetrating eyes under penthouse brows. We went up into Benton's room, where I carefully told him the whole story, including what I have just said about my suspicions of Jasmine.

He shook his head.

"I know to whom you have reference," said he. "The man is a Venezuelan of

rank, very rich, and the owner of some plantations and a distillery over by Morne Rouge. It is impossible that he could be mixed up with any such affair. The young lady is a Mlle. Saint Cyr, of a good Martinique family, most of which was wiped out by the eruption of Pelée some twenty years ago, when more than thirty thousand people were destroyed."

"What is Mlle. Saint Cyr's first name?" I asked.

I was not at all surprised when the chief answered:

"I believe it is Hyacinthe, or Narcisse, or some such flower."

I was on the point of suggesting "Jasmine," but I refrained, asking, instead, where this young lady lived.

"She lives with her mother at Bellevue," he answered with a shrug, as if my question was of small importance; "but I am of the idea that she spends most of her time, if not all, at the houses of friends or relatives. She also visits Mme. Dieudonné of Guadeloupe; but it is impossible to think of her in this connection. This Señor de Gonzá is an old friend of the family. He comes here for a month or so, twice a year; but all of that is of no importance to us. Mme. Saint Cyr is a lady above all suspicion."

"May I ask if you have formed any opinion of the case?" I inquired.

He shook his head.

"I shall have to make some further investigations," he answered noncommittally. "It will be necessary to question some old people of the St. Pierre of twenty years ago. Unfortunately, the *dossiers* of M. Grosvenor must have been destroyed by the volcano."

That was about all there was to be got out of him. It left me far from satisfied, and did not alter my conviction that Jasmine Saint Cyr was somehow involved; but with such a rolling stone as he described her, there seemed discouragingly little to go on.

The chief took his departure, and Benton and I went down on the terrace to get our dinner. As we made our way to the table reserved for us, I got another and perhaps the strongest of my series of shocks; for sitting at a table on the edge of the garden were Jasmine and a pretty Junoesque woman of middle age and quietly elegant appearance.

(To be continued in the February number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

Little Ghosts

THE STORY OF A WOMAN WHO HAD MAGIC IN HER

By Frederic and Fanny Hatton

ANGUS SHORT drew up before the home of his old friend, John Ramsey, in a state of curious foreboding. For years they had been a sort of reincarnation of Damon and Pythias—reserved and subdued, to be sure, for they were both Scotch; but their association had seemed an indestructible one.

John Ramsey, M. A., Ph. D., had won fame and fortune as a naturalist and essayist of no mean ability.

As for Angus, he was John's publisher. He had always envied John's opportunities to explore the higher altitudes of literary effort; but this envy was tempered by so sincere an admiration for his friend's genius that it had only served to cement the bond between them. John was his other self; even John's marriage had not altered that. Not a day passed over their heads that they did not spend some part of it together.

When John Ramsey died, it seemed to Angus that the solid ground beneath his feet had given way. Even after two months his grief was as keen and poignant as on the day when he received word of his friend's death.

He paused at the gate to look up the gravel path at the solid stone house on the ridge. He remembered how John Ramsey, having the naturalist's love for isolation, had had it built to be away from the road and from his neighbors. To be sure, the town had crept up about the Ramsey acres, but hedges and shrubbery shut it out from the frippery of suburban architecture.

Angus had not been to the Ramsey place since John's funeral. It hurt him strangely to look into the garden and realize that he and John would never sit there together again; but John's widow had sent for him, and he put aside his own feeling of desolation to go to her.

Angus had never liked Betty Ramsey.

He did not understand his friend's marrying her; he was still more mystified when the union stood the strain of seasons and lengthened from a first into a fifth year. Even Angus, however, had been forced to admit that their life together had been an ideally happy one.

Since John's death Angus had been expecting this call. John had several times referred to a script which was to go into his publisher's hands after his demise—an event which had been forecast many months earlier by the doctors. This manuscript was a precious legacy to Angus, and he could hardly wait to receive it; so he pushed open the gate and went in to see Betty.

She received him in the late scholar's library—an austere retreat in which she seemed strangely out of place. She looked like a fresh garden flower decorously tied with black ribbon and placed in an arid area hitherto given over exclusively to severe intellectuality.

Angus Short mentally compared John Ramsey's widow with Mona Lisa. There was something inscrutable behind her grief. It seemed a mask. He was not sure whether the corners of her mouth turned up or down, or if her eyes glittered with tears or sparkled with—well, what?

However, there was nothing obviously inappropriate in her action or her garb. She was conventional in rigorous sable, and he would have sworn on oath to the sincerity of her grief; for in this, at least, he and Mrs. Ramsey met on common ground—they both had loved John.

He looked across the library table, objectively reminiscent of the departed John. He marveled that any one so pretty, so tiny, so gracefully ensembled, could be so dull as Betty Ramsey. Beauty, he felt, should express, mentally and vocally, some of the artistry of its making. He remembered

with bitterness the banalities she had contributed to his talks with his old friend in the days that were gone. And yet what a picture she made as she fronted him, creamy skinned, blue of eye, golden of hair—a very living challenge to the dolorous black in which she had framed herself!

"John," he had once put the matter to his old friend in a frank moment, "why did you ever marry her? You have the finest mind I know, while she hasn't an intelligent idea in her head. Your work means nothing to her. There, I'm sorry! I hope I haven't hurt you, but I had to say it!"

"Don't apologize," John had returned. "I know just what you mean. Betty lacks intellectuality. I doubt if she has understood one serious line that I ever wrote."

"I'd hate to admit to you what Betty really reads and enjoys," John had resumed after a pause. Then, with a light coming into his eyes, he went on: "People who do not know her would call her unawakened; but that is not true. She's a beautiful, merry child. She has a nymphlike fashion of liking things as they pass before her eyes. Her hold on me is far more than a mere physical one. She is all the things I'm not. She gives me complements. She brings things which fill my empty niches and corners. Angus, I'm absolutely mad about her. She answers some great, vague masculine want in me—something that is beyond intellect and reason. I never question her hold on me; I accept it gratefully, thanking God that it exists. I don't care that she is dull; I never think of it. Her innocent prattle never disturbs me, for my mind soars on, happily solaced, as it were by the singing of a bird or the tinkling of a tiny waterfall. She does what no other woman has done, no matter how brilliant—she satisfies me!"

This talk, however, had impressed on Angus only the utter futility of man and man attempting to reach intelligent conclusions on the subject of woman. He had left more than ever impressed with the infirmities of noble intellects.

II

Now, as he faced his friend's widow, he made a last loyal attempt to see her through her dead husband's eyes, puzzling again over the problem of her hold on John Ramsey.

Of the utter and damnable commonplace-

ness of Betty Ramsey's mind her visitor was completely aware; but he realized sharply that she had never looked more lovely than at this moment, in her widowy black, or more feminine. The somber fabrics brought out sharply her glamorously golden hair, the gentian blue of her eyes, and the flower tints of her face—a face that even the severe Angus admitted to be flawless.

After a careful scrutiny he felt the validity of his former estimates. Her only influence was a physical one; other charms she had not. When he saw her, he always thought of the line in Genesis:

Male and female created He them.

She made him feel that there were sexes. Something in her was always calling emphatically, not to the mind. He acknowledged to his inner self—a being whom he treated with a fierce honesty—that this appeal was magnet strong, even to his disinterested breast.

So he spoke to her with unusual gentleness. Betty had always feared this brusque friend of John's, and the new tone in his voice filled her with a childlike gratitude. How wise John was! He had often told her that Angus had a heart of gold hidden under his curt exterior. To-day she felt that she saw the publisher through John's eyes.

"I waited for you to send for me, Betty," Angus said. "I did not want to intrude on your grief."

Her sweet mouth trembled.

"Oh, Angus!" she faltered. "I am so lonely without him!"

Angus leaned over and put his hand on hers.

"I know, my dear," he said. "The world isn't the same place to either of us; but you must have courage."

She nodded dumbly, struggling to regain her self-control.

"John left a letter to me, did he not?" asked Angus. "Do you want me to take it now?"

She nodded. Then from a drawer of the table she brought out an addressed envelope and a packet of manuscript.

"John said that these were to be given to you." There was a break in her voice over the beloved name. "I had a letter, also, telling me that this manuscript should be edited and published as John's last work. It is in the form of letters."

"I know," Angus said. "He told me about it the last time I saw him."

"John asked me to let you read it first; and I want"—her voice broke pitifully—"to do everything as he wished it, now that he has gone."

She dissolved into tears and held out the package to him blindly, her slender body shaking with sobs.

Angus was strangely moved. He put a gentle hand on her shoulder. With the quick gratitude of a child, she turned, took his hand in her own, and placed her tear-stained face against it. The touch of her soft cheek sent a curious truant thrill through Angus. His lean fingers closed tightly on her little ones.

The precious letters, unnoted, fell to the table beside them.

"There, there!" he comforted her awkwardly. "Don't cry, Betty. We must be brave!"

She made a valiant effort to regain her composure.

"I know." She struggled with her woe. "He would have said that, too; but I'm all alone, and I miss him so! He said you would look after me and advise me. Will you, Angus? You are all I have now."

Her voice quivered sweetly again as she looked up at him. Though little given to the reading or writing of poetry, Angus felt at this moment that her eyes were like violets drenched in rain. After all, what was she but a child bereft of its protector? He had not realized how dependent she was on John's love and care. And now she was John's legacy to him, this pink and white creature all heart and no head.

He drew her to her feet and held her with a gentle, brotherly arm, while she sobbed comfortably on his broad chest.

"I cannot live without him," she wailed. "He was my all, we were made for each other, he was my other self. My heart is broken!"

Angus patted her shoulders monotonously. Even in his own grief for his friend he noted that she phrased her speech in the most banal of platitudes.

"How good you are, Angus!" she murmured. "John loved you so much! I was jealous of you sometimes; but you'll forgive me, won't you? Really I shouldn't have been, for John always loved me best of all. Oh, why did he have to die, Angus?"

She drenched his coat as she gave away to another burst of sobbing. Ordinarily

steeled against all emotional outbursts, he was deeply moved by her very weakness. She seemed so frail and young, and her grief was so great. It was many years since a woman had nestled close to him, and the sensation was strangely gratifying. Unsuspected by himself, there was much of the physical in this big Scotchman, and it answered boldly to this tearful feminine appeal. He gazed out in a dim haze of stirred emotions, a sense of humor, meanwhile, striving to release itself and battle against this awakening sex.

Finally, because the humor had had the upper hand for so many years, it conquered. Smiling inwardly at himself, he fished out from his pocket a large, clean handkerchief and carefully dried the widow's tears. He chided her playfully for dampening his tweed coat, asked that he might have tea made for him, and even made her smile with his graphic description of the particular little sandwiches he would like.

Always a zealous housewife, Betty ran out quickly to prepare his refreshment. He was left alone with John's letters in the room which so breathed its former occupant's presence.

III

ANGUS first opened the letter addressed to him, and read:

DEAR OLD SCOT:

Two top-notchers, Gregg and Maxwell, have given me my death warrant to-day. They agree that I haven't a year longer to live. It's this weak heart of mine; they tell me it's on its last ebb.

I won't deny I've had some bitter moments since. It's not easy to go while life's so wonderful; but I've fought the battle through, and now I'm ready—except for Betty.

As I sit here alone and think over my friends, I know only one man in whom I can trust absolutely—you, Angus; and so I ask this of you, old friend. Look after Betty for me. Console her, help her to bear this first great grief. Be her adviser. She loves me, and she will be desolate.

I know you do not care for her. You've never understood why I married her. To you she is a dull, commonplace woman with a pretty face. You think her only charm is a physical one.

Whatever it is, you'll find it out, and then you'll understand. As for me, I love her with every drop of blood in my body, and the thought of leaving her crucifies me. She has been my life, she has filled me to the brim; and I know you will be kind and faithful to her for my sake.

There's a manuscript I want published after my death. I've written a series of letters, I think they are the best work I've done. They are the letters I would have written Betty had she understood them. I dedicate them to her, so that her sweet soul will not be tortured by thinking I had some other woman in mind. She must never

know that I wrote them to be published in this way.

Edit them as you see fit. I know you will care for them. They are of my best.

My will makes you my sole executor, and without bond. I rely on you to see that Betty and her affairs are looked after. In all business matters she is a child. I leave her enough money to provide for her needs, and I commend her to you, my more than friend.

JOHN RAMSEY.

Below the signature, and evidently written in at some later day, was a little additional note in lead pencil. Angus perused it with grim humor. His friend, evidently, had possessed a clairvoyant sense. The whimsical warning was this:

She has magic in her somewhere, dear old Scot. Look out for it!

Angus, nevertheless, closed the letter reverently. John's clear, distinctive handwriting gave him a new feeling of loss.

He turned solemnly to the opening of the manuscript. He found it, as John had written, a series of letters dedicated to "my beloved wife, Elizabeth Ramsey."

Angus knew, before he had gone through two of the epistles, that John Ramsey had never written anything better. He glanced through others hurriedly, sensing that he had beneath his fingers the outpourings of a deep, imaginative soul—the full, free expressions of John's richest moments. What a new aspect of his old friend, and what an opportunity! To be the one who should reveal them to the world!

The heart of Angus swelled with pride in his dead comrade's achievement. What a beautiful bequest to the world! With what a happy stroke had John carved the "finis" on the tablet of his career!

Angus resolved to have the letters published at once, just as they stood. It was his sentiment to set them forth without change or cutting, exactly as John had written them.

One letter in particular chained his fancy. He read it again and again, finding it a prose poem. To his mind it was a soul appeal. He placed it at the top of the pile of script, leaving it so that when Mrs. Ramsey came to read the letters she would find it first. He felt that it would awaken even her dormant spiritual self.

IV

ANGUS was driven from further contemplations of his treasure by Mrs. Ramsey, who had come back to tea and feed him.

She chattered in a birdlike way, and he listened patiently, still puzzling over the old enigma of her charm. She was as dainty as a bit of Dresden, and her tiny fingers moved about among the tea things like little flowers fluttering in the summer breeze.

Angus told her of the letters, saying that he would leave them with her for the night, so that she might go over them before he prepared them for the printer. She promised, in an awed voice, to read them at once. Her eyes were misty as Angus bade her good-by, saying that he would return early on the morrow.

He was up early in the morning, anxious to have the letters back in his possession. He was eager to run through them all carefully, to gloat over them to his heart's content, to arrange their sequence, and to decide in what form he should give them to the public. At nine o'clock he was sitting in Mrs. Ramsey's chintz-hung nest, waiting for her.

She did not appear immediately. When she did come, Angus realized that the letters had wrought a great change in her. The color was gone from her cheeks and lips, and her blue eyes were framed in great violet shadows.

Something in her face even less tangible struck terror to his soul. For this suspicion, however, he immediately chided himself. He put it by impatiently and with self-reproach. What right had he to deny her all human feeling? What woman could have read those wonderful letters without being deeply moved?

Mrs. Ramsey motioned him to sit near her. She faced him tremblingly, and he saw that she had a bundle in her hands. Above and behind her head a canary sang noisily in a chalet of golden wire, and the widow's voice rose through these shriller tones.

"I read all the letters, Angus," she began haltingly. "I read them many times. I didn't go to bed until it was daylight."

"Aren't they wonderful?" Angus asked reverently. "Few women have had such a tribute."

She looked at him defiantly, wildly, for a moment.

"How can you say that?" she cried. "How can you want other people to know—the public who think of John as a famous naturalist, and who respect and value his writings? What will they think when they

read those terrible letters—those senseless, meaningless things?"

Angus, half choked, rose and put out his hands protestingly.

"Betty, Betty, you don't understand! Those letters are sublime. John never wrote anything better. This last work of his is all in a new key. It means new fame for him!"

"No, no, no!" Her head was nodding vehemently. "If you're so blind, I'm not. No one knew him as I did, and I can't understand why I didn't see that his illness had driven him out of his mind. It wasn't my splendid John who wrote those idiotic letters—it was a madman. I won't have people know that John ever was like that! The public shall think of him as he was before this madness came on him. No one shall ever see one of those letters!"

Angus grew weak. He felt his knees quivering beneath him. He steadied himself by putting a hand on the table near him.

"You can't mean it, Betty!" he cried. "Listen to me!"

She rose and faced him steadily, looking like a tragedy queen for all her diminutive prettiness.

"I've burned them," she said. "They are ashes now, and no one knows but you and me."

Angus was stunned. He fell back into his chair. For a time he was beyond exclamation, objection, or objurgation. He dimly felt that he was face to face with a literary crime of the first order.

He stared numbly at the peaches-and-cream villainess confronting him. He was chairman of an organization for the protection of children and animals, but at this moment all his humanity and kindness of heart deserted him. He saw red, and felt a horrible desire to strike a woman. His face frightened Betty, and she burst into tears.

"Oh, Angus!" she sobbed. "Don't scold me! John told you to be kind to me when he was gone. I'm very unhappy to think that John was even temporarily insane and I never knew it. How can you have so little sympathy?"

Tearful, feminine, and altogether lovely, she came close to the unhappy Angus and laid a beseeching hand on his uplifted arm.

He writhed as one in a net. He felt helpless and captive. Despite his high valuation of John's lost letters, and his certainty as to the shallowness of this woman's mind,

he felt himself being conquered by a force he despised. He looked down into the widow's flower face, and was silent.

"You must remember," she said, "that the letters were written to me. I couldn't understand a word of them. They were just ravings. My John was not there. His dear hand wrote them, but his wonderful mind must have been unbalanced. Oh, Angus, think of it! Poor boy, he wanted those foolish, meaningless things published, and I couldn't—I couldn't! I loved him too well!"

Angus fought dumbly for composure. Meanwhile Betty knelt beside his chair and clasped her fingers across his helpless knee.

"Angus, please smile at poor Betty! John never scolded me as you have. I'm only doing what I think is right."

The perfume of her hair floated across his face, the tender nearness of her unnerved him. He closed his eyes. He quickly opened them again, for the touch of her only seemed the more poignant.

"I am not angry," he said finally. "Get up, Betty."

With the blood pounding in his temples, he helped her to her feet and placed her in a chair. Then he mopped his scarlet brow and sat looking at the inexplicable widow. With maddening persistency John Ramsey's written words flashed across his brain:

She has magic in her somewhere. Look out for it!

Wise John—he knew! Angus grimly remembered his wonder that John could endure Betty's dullness—Betty, who had just done so dreadful a thing that his soul revolted to contemplate it—Betty, whom he basely longed to gather to his breast and smother with kisses!

"But, Angus," Betty began in a propitiating manner, "I have some beautiful letters of John's here—the letters he wrote to me—lots of them. I've saved every little note, and you shall publish as many as you like. I hate to have the public read my love letters, but if John wanted what he wrote to me given out to the world I shall see that his wish is gratified. I won't let my feelings stand in the way."

"I—I—" murmured Angus, trying to grasp what had happened.

"Those awful letters have been burned," she went on rapidly; "but here are these. Oh, Angus, they are beautiful! Every one will think so!"

Betty put a package of letters in his unresisting hand, then cooed over him softly.

"You sit here and read them while I see to a few little things. I'll be back after a while, and then we'll have lunch. I'll have crab *ravigote* for you, Angus. I know you love it."

She fluttered out, leaving him dumbly contemplating the letters that she had laid before him.

V

AFTER a time—he did not know whether it was minutes or hours—Angus plucked up courage to investigate these other secrets of John's past mental gyrations. Here, he felt, he would find the true story of his friend's passion for Betty. The first letter bore in dully on his tortured brain as he read:

MY BABY GIRL:

I'm sending up a messenger boy with a big box of the chocolate peppermints my sweetums loves. Each time you put your blessed little teeth in one of them you must think of your poor Jack down in a stuffy old publisher's, going over inky proofs and missing you every second. I'm coming home at four. You must have on that new yellow kimono that I brought you, and we'll pretend that you're a naughty little geisha and that I'm a handsome stranger coming to have tea. And you better have lots of cakes and things, or I'll eat you up.

Oceans and oodles of lovings, honey girl, and thousands of kisses and snuggles.

Your lonesome
JACK.

Angus groaned deeply over this. He hoped that it might have got into the package by mistake. He reached into the pile of letters with his eyes shut, and extracted this:

MY LITTLE CUDDLEKINS:

How dare you go away for a whole day and night without me? I'm raging around like a lost soul, looking for you under all the tables and chairs. If you don't come right straight home on the next train, I'll come down there and kidnap you. Your little bits of booties are just where you left them, under the table opposite me while I write, and I pretend they are you. Can you feel me stepping on your darling little footsies right this second?

Bad Betty to go off and leave her big man! Big man whip if Betty does that again! Betty must sit right on his knee forever and ever, and never even stop to eat. Big lovings and one of those laster kisses—a long one. Jack loves his baby girl lots and gobs and a hundred bears and two moons.

HER OWNEST HUSBAND.

Angus closed his eyes wearily. He did not believe that they had read aright. Surely

ly he was still asleep, the day had not dawned, this terrible thing had not happened, and John Ramsey's wonderful letters were safe!

But no, he was awake. In his hands, on the table before him, the merciless little ghosts arose to confront him. Such gibbering, shadowy little ghosts they were! John, wherever his wandering soul might be, doubtless underwent a violent resubjection to the trials of purgatory as these shameless little phantoms came out from the past to torment him in his grave.

Angus groaned aloud. With a final effort he tore a note from near the center of the pile, hoping against hope that one bright star would shine in this befogged sky. But John had run riot there. Angus wept as he read:

ICKLE BITTY SWEETUMS:

Does she love her old Jacky boy, and did she send him nice, fat special with a million fresh kisses for his breakfast? Big man will be back Sunday, and will never go on bad choo-choo again. Baby girl must be very careful of precious self, and not let naughty swinging door hit her or wicked autos run over her. Her Jack couldn't live without his baby.

Big longings and achings for Betty from her homesick

JACKY BOY.

P. S.—And eight billion kisses right on her little moufy!

It was more than Angus could bear. He rose, bitterly tortured, and the little ghosts fluttered to the floor. He gathered them up dully, put them on the table, and turned to escape.

Betty was just coming back. She held a tall, frosty cup in her hands. Waving green mint signaled the approach of a delectable julep. Betty's eyes were radiant and expectant.

"It was so warm," she announced hospitably, "that I made this for you myself."

He took it, with feeble, murmured thanks, and drank it—nervously, to begin with, and then gratefully, as the liquor fortified his weakening senses. He found strength to face the terrible inspiration of all the infantile banality he just had read.

To his horror, he felt that the woman was good to look upon—that she was fair—that she was desirable. Escape was urgent. He sought with his eyes for an exit. Any door or window would do; but no, the little ghosts were still there, and his remaining duty in the world was their destruction.

That would be difficult. He must ac-

compish it guilefully; then he would forever leave her.

"You've read them?" she asked.

"Yes, dear," he said; "but these letters are too sacred to be tossed to the world. They were meant only for your eyes."

"I am willing to sacrifice myself to carry out poor John's wishes," she returned quickly.

"But you're not carrying out poor John's wishes. He asked that the other letters should be published, not these."

"But I know what he wanted—to have something left behind that would show his love for me. It was beautiful of him!"

Angus called out his reserve force of Scottish stubbornness.

"But those other letters," he resumed, "were less personal, more literary, more—er—possible. Yours are so intimate that no publisher would handle them."

"Then I'll publish them myself," she persisted. "John's wish must be carried out."

"John's last word to me was that I should look after you. As his executor, I forbid you to print these letters!"

She began to weep.

"Oh, if John were only here! Oh, dear, dear, good John, why did they take you away from me?"

Angus abhorred tears as nature does a vacuum, but these were very pathetic little tears, and Betty was adorable as her little hand held a little handkerchief to her pretty little face. She was one of those rare beings who can cry without sniffing. There was rhythm in the big tears as they rolled down her cheeks one by one. It was a sight to move a heart of stone.

The hour was a bitter one for Angus. He realized that he needed every bit of sophistry and cunning he possessed to turn her mind from this dangerous channel. He argued, he entreated, he commanded.

Finally, exhausted in mind and body, and weakened by her own tears, she gave in to his stronger will. She agreed to burn the letters. He compromised by promising to publish John's last nature essays.

Eager to placate her in every way, he arranged to make a little rite of the burning of the letters. He would take her out into the country in his car. They would make a little funeral pyre in the open, place the ashes of the little ghosts in an urn, and bury them.

Betty's childlike soul took much comfort

from this, and Angus carried out his part of the compact solemnly and thankfully.

VI

DAY after day found Angus wending his way to the widow's house, bent on his mission of cheer and consolation, as became a faithful executor. It was he who dried her endless tears, who coaxed her to eat, who called her early and late on the telephone, who provided her with light reading matter and her favorite confections.

The snare settled down on him. Betty played the piano beautifully in her airy, birdlike manner, her little fingers fluttering over the keys. When she did so, Angus dreamed idly, or silently watched her, utterly fascinated.

On his desk, at his office, a mound of work mounted, forgotten, its arbiter truantly throwing himself heart and soul into a new life. John had asked Angus to look after Betty, and he was doing so with a vengeance.

Months flew by—months of bewilderment, of mingled joy and pain, for Angus, and of growing content for Betty. Her first sharp grief had eased, and now she turned with the directness of a child to the being who stood next in line for her affections. She mothered Angus, she studied his wants, she undermined him with rare dishes and insidious beverages, she lured his soul with music, she riveted his senses to her beauty. He was caught like a helpless moth in an almost invisible net—a net which a touch might have broken away; but still he hung unresisting between earth and sky.

Betty's prattle, in time, grew to be grateful in the once fastidious ears of Angus. Her banalities lost their terror under the witchery of her dimpled smile.

So summer passed and fall came. On a September evening the publisher directed his feet to the widow's house, just as they had gone on the evenings of July and August. The two had dined together; she had played his favorite Chopin; they had wandered out on the big, dim porch overlooking the garden.

The city seemed utterly at peace. Hardly a sound reached them from beyond the garden walls. A round moon was peering through the trees, dropping slants of silver across the veranda with mellow witchery.

Betty wore a garment fraught with danger. It was a sort of tea gown, thin, lacy, frilly, with bows and snares, artfully de-

signed to show more than it concealed. In it Betty was alluring beyond words.

She sat beside him in the swinging seat, the moonbeams turning her blond head into a golden snare, the faint perfume which seemed a part of her filling the air with its insidious lure. Betty herself, soft, exquisite, palpitating, impended — perilously near. The hammock swung to and fro idly, and Angus's brain seemed to swing with it.

Betty smiled up at him.

"What is it, Angus?" she said. "You haven't talked to me for ages."

"I can't talk," Angus answered hoarsely. "I can only feel."

She moved a trifle closer.

"Tell me!" she whispered. "Please, Scotchman, tell Betty!"

Angus looked into her tender eyes and forgot that there was anything in the world but this one woman.

"You, you!" he stammered. "I am mad about you, Betty! What have you done to me? I think I'm going crazy. I've lost my mind!"

"You're much nicer without it," Betty whispered. "I haven't done anything to you. Do you care a little, Angus?"

He looked at her dumbly. A great wave of emotion swept over him, through which he blundered desperately to gain his footing; but he felt himself drawn further and further into the vortex that surged around him. Through the red blood that blinded him, he reached out for her and closed his arms around her. He heard a voice, which sounded like his own, murmuring indistinctly; and then, for one never to be forgotten moment, his mouth met hers.

When he came to his senses, she was still in his arms, her lovely face resting trustingly on his breast. He waited for her reproaches. Her arm stole about his neck.

"Oh, Angus!" she said. "You big cave-man, I adore you! Kiss me again!"

And Angus bent his head and kissed her, not once, but many times.

Then he fled out into the moonlit night, her cooing protests in his ears, the memory of her sweet, soft self and the touch of her mounting to his fevered brain like wine.

VII

ONCE at home, calmness returned to him. He sat alone, in awful communion with his battered soul. Away from the glamour of her presence, he knew Betty to be shallow and utterly lacking in intelligence and im-

agination. She was the last woman in the world, he felt, to understand him or make him happy. Her mind was commonplace, her spirit had not a touch of divine fire.

Against these gloomy mental specters there trooped in visions of her beauty, uninvited thoughts of her charm, of her eyes, of her throbbing little breast, of the cool patter of her voice. The disturbing quality of her physical magnetism assailed him.

All night long he fought his battle. At dawn he was at his desk, writing this note:

DEAR LITTLE BETTY:

Last night I forgot myself. Forgive me, for I shall not do so again. I am going West for a long trip, and I shall not return for months. I've left your affairs in good shape, and your lawyer will see that nothing goes wrong. Of course I shall write you often.

When I am sane again, I shall come back. Meanwhile I am always,

Your devoted friend,

ANGUS SHORT.

Then he slept, once more feeling master of himself.

Incredibly early in the day, it seemed, he was called to the telephone, and Betty's voice was in his ear. Even the sound of it unsteadied him, but he summoned all his self-restraint as he spoke to her.

Alas, her first words brought back his longing for her!

"I want my caveman," she said. "Come to lunch, Angus. Betty's lonely!"

He consented to the luncheon, assuring himself that he would mail the letter immediately afterward. Her laugh rang through the wire, and there was an irresistible coo in her tones as she chided him playfully.

"Do you miss me?" she asked. "Do you miss me dreadfully?"

"Dreadfully," Angus answered with grim truth. "I can't wait to see you!"

"Then hurry, because I'm missing you!"

Whereupon she put her lips to the telephone and sent him a kiss across the wire. Angus actually sent one back, so low had he fallen. As he put the receiver up, his conscience told him that he had sounded the depths of humiliation; but his unruly heart beat violently at the thought of seeing Betty.

He shaved and dressed and sent to the florist's for flowers. Half an hour later he had torn the letter on his desk into a hundred pieces, and had written in its place another to go with the violets. In the clear sunlight, in his sober senses, with the memory of the night's struggle indelibly en-

graved on his mind, Angus Short sat down and perpetrated this:

MY BABY GIRL:

The naughty caveman can hardly wait until luncheon. Here are some violets to match the blue in Betty's eyes—the eyes I kissed last night. And Betty's big Scotch thistle loves her and loves her and loves her. And she must love him back—she must, or Angus will die. The caveman sends a million big bold kisses to his beautiful sweetheart babykins.

Your adoring
ANGUS.

As he folded and sealed the letter, preparatory to dropping it into the box of flowers which the servant was to deliver to Betty, he looked down at this damning written evidence of his infatuation. There was terror in his heart as his helpless fingers dropped the letter on the flowers; for well he knew this was the first of the little ghosts whose unwritten fellows would some day come to life and rise up brazenly, triumphantly, to haunt him.

Lucky Numbers

A GREAT DAY FOR TWO GENERATIONS OF THE SPEARS AND WEYMAN FAMILIES

By Elmer Brown Mason

"SO that's *that*," the boy said, as he laid his cigarette case in front of him and extracted a cigarette.

The girl did not answer for a moment. Instead, she sat contemplating the gloomy young face across the narrow table.

The boy sighed, reached for the case, then drew his hand back as the girl leaned forward and took a cigarette. She lit it meditatively while he watched her, waving aside his assistance. The waiter removed the tea things and discreetly withdrew.

"Fond of me, Tommy?" she asked softly, when they were alone.

"Foolish question nine million and one," he answered; "but if you want me to say it, I will. In fact, I like saying it. I love you awfully!"

"Of course I want you to say it. I'm crazy about you, too, Tommy. Really, aren't parents just perfectly punk?"

"I don't get 'em," Tommy agreed gloomily. "Father married mother when he was a year younger than I am."

"Same here," said Anthea. "I've heard mother say a hundred times that she put up her hair the day she was married. Never understood why she didn't have it bobbed. It conceals your age awfully well;" and she shook her own very curtailed locks.

"Of course all this age stuff is nothing but a stall," Tommy announced. "The

real reason is that your dad and mine love one another like—like a *real* soldier loves an M. P."

"Dad sprang a new one on me last night, when I suggested that he might be nice to you when you called to-day," Anthea contributed. "Said that if you had been any good, you would have been an officer in the war, instead of a private, and would have pulled something noble."

The boy flushed angrily, then grinned. It was a very pleasant grin, and it brought a smile to the girl's face. Their eyes met and held.

"You *are* a dear, Tommy," she whispered. "I'd like to kiss you this minute!"

"Shan't resist," the boy answered, then returned to the last subject. "I should have been an officer if I had been old enough. As it was, I was better at peeling potatoes than anything else, so I served my country as K. P. most of the time. I ought to have had the *croix de pommes de terre*."

"I tell you one thing, Tommy Weyman," Anthea stated positively. "I'm glad you didn't get into the rough part of the war. I'm glad you stayed in America, even though I wasn't crazy about you then. I was too young, I suppose. If you had, I should be worrying about it now, even when it's all over."

"*Guerre finie*," the boy laughed, then

grew serious. "We aren't getting anywhere, though. What are we going to do about our parents? That's what I want to know."

Anthea sat back in her chair, caught her upper lip between her teeth—a sure sign of absorption—and gave herself up to deep thought. Tommy withdrew his eyes from her, for that was the only way he could think at all in her presence. He found himself speculating on Princeton's chances in football that year with an entirely green back field.

"I have it!" Anthea said suddenly. "We'll give 'em a month to learn reason, and we'll not see each other during that time."

"Not see each other!" Tommy repeated. "Why not? I don't see such an awful lot of you now that it hurts me. How is it going to help, not seeing each other?"

"It's going to please our awful dads," Anthea answered seriously. "Then, if they aren't reasonable, we'll—what do you say if we just get married, Tommy?"

"My Lord! But why wait a month, if we're going to do that? Wouldn't it be rather awful for you, though—no bridesmaids or anything?"

"Bridesmaids are frightfully *passé*," the girl informed him. "Besides, when the dads come around afterward, and force their blessings on us, they'll give us the money the wedding would have cost. At least, my dad will, and yours will be ashamed not to do likewise. We'll probably need the money, too."

Tommy regarded his prospective bride with unmixed admiration.

"You certainly have a head on your shoulders, Anthea Spears," he said. "I'll be willing not to see you for a month, if you'll marry me at the end of it."

"I will," Anthea nodded her head emphatically. "I will. But, Tommy, don't go too far away. Keep where I can know where you are," she added fearfully.

"You're going to Palm Beach, and I'll come down on my two weeks' vacation and join dad," the boy reassured her. "I may write to you, though, mayn't I?"

"Yes, but typewrite the address on the envelope; and oh, Tommy, I have an idea in case a letter should get lost—"

II

JOHN WADDINGTON SPEARS gave his hat and overcoat to the second man and walked

up the stairs to his wife's drawing-room. The door was open, showing Mrs. Spears placidly knitting in a large rocking-chair. She looked up as he entered, saw that something had annoyed him, divined by the perfect second sight of twenty years of married life that it was nothing serious, and smiled up at him, waiting for him to speak.

"Young Weyman was in to see me this afternoon," he said, as he sat down opposite her. "Frightfully polite and awfully nervous. He might have known that I wouldn't eat him up, even if he is his father's son!"

"Yes—Anthea warned you last night, you remember," Mrs. Spears said comfortably, furnishing no assistance.

"He asked me for Anthea's hand in the most approved fashion, and was very much embarrassed over it."

"I remember," Mrs. Spears stated reminiscently, "that when you called on my father, he couldn't make out for some time what you were talking about, and—"

"That was entirely different," Mr. Spears interrupted. "He was an unreasonable old fellow, and you know it. I sent the boy about his business kindly but firmly. I told him he was too young, and Anthea wasn't old enough to know her own mind. Young men in my day weren't able to leave their jobs in the afternoon to run on fools' errands!" he concluded irritably.

"I don't know what to do with the child," Mrs. Spears complained, laying down her knitting. "She seems absolutely set on marrying the boy. I'm afraid she's breaking her heart over him."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Spears. "If she didn't see him for a month, she'd forget all about him. It's ridiculous the way children—here she is now!"

"Hello, mums! Cheerio, dad!" their daughter greeted them. "Why are half of you looking so serious?"

"We were talking about you, dear," her mother answered. "Tom Weyman came to see your father this afternoon. Of course, he's a charming boy, but you are both too young to think of anything so serious as matrimony for a long time yet."

"I suppose you married without thinking, then, when you had to put up your hair to get by? Why didn't you bob it? You weren't any older than I am, mums."

"That has nothing to do with it," broke in Mr. Spears. "Times have changed. I

had known your mother all my life. It's only a passing fancy, my dear—trust an older head than yours. Your mother was just saying to me that if you didn't see him for a month, you'd probably forget all about him."

"You may have said that. Mother never did," Anthea answered indignantly. She glanced at her mother's face, and continued in positive tones: "Yes, *you* said it! Well, suppose I don't see him for a month and still am crazy about him—what then?"

"Why, try not seeing him a second month, of course," Mr. Spears suggested brightly.

"I don't think that's very sporting of you," Anthea stated in pained tones. "I'll make you a proposition, though. I won't see him for a month. Will you give him another chance to talk to you then?"

"Fine!" her father agreed, anxious to get rid of the subject. "Fine! You'll probably be saner then. Mind, I don't promise anything but to give him another chance to talk to me," he added cautiously.

III

THE Spearses had owned a cottage at Palm Beach for so long that it classed them with people who remember how good the strawberries tasted that were grown on the present site of the Waldorf. Mr. Spears was wont to say that the place had changed a lot since he first came there on a shooting trip. It had been wild then, but nothing to what it was now!

After a disastrous evening at the Beach Club—which he called Bradley's, after the fashion of all dyed-in-the-wool Palm Beachers—he would always threaten to sell, and to buy near the Everglades, where it was possible to sleep without being disturbed by women going in bathing in evening gowns at six o'clock in the morning. Secretly, however, he was proud of owning a place in the greatest time-killing resort in the world, where beach front couldn't be bought at any price. The golf links, too, in his opinion, were of the best, and there was no limit at the gambling tables.

Mrs. Spears took a placid enjoyment in her winter home, and a horrified pleasure in the doings of the *nouveaux riches*, as she characterized all people who did not belong to her own exclusive circle, or played bridge for more than ten cents a point.

It was Anthea, however, who really revelled in Palm Beach. She had enjoyed it as

a little girl, she had found it amazingly attractive as a sub-deb, and now, in full deb-hood, it offered every conceivable pleasure. There was unlimited dancing, and she loved dancing; unlimited ocean, and she loved swimming; a host of friends, and she was a sociable soul. As she wrote to Tommy:

It's as ripping here, as always. There are a lot of new steps I'm crazy to teach you. I won fifty dollars at auction this week. Dad has picked up a couple of strokes a round, and has learned to use a mashie as if it was a club, *not* a croquet mallet. He has only had one bad night at Bradley's, too, so you see everything is all serene. I'm crazy to see you, to have the month over, and 9, 12-15-22-5, 25-15-21.

ANTHEA.

IV

"For Heaven's sake, what's the matter?" demanded Tommy, as he crossed swiftly from the train to where Anthea stood by her bicycle.

"Everything is just unutterably punk," she greeted him. "Grab a wheel from somewhere and ride down on the beach with me. I'll tell you all about it."

People still ride bicycles at Palm Beach, and Tommy had no difficulty in taking one away from a friend. He did not try to ask any questions till they had ridden far down the beach, away from the Casino, where the bathers crowd together for their morning dip.

"There's an awful row on," Anthea announced, as she slipped off her wheel and let it fall sidewise on the sand.

"I thought everything was fine," Tommy answered. "You wrote me it was."

"Our awful, *awful* dads!" Anthea sighed. "Listen to me, dear, while I give you the low-down. Your parent and mine were paired in the first round of this month's tournament at the Everglades Club. Yours gave mine a stroke a hole—and trimmed him ten up and eight to play!"

Tom whistled. When he spoke, his voice was full of justifiable resentment.

"He never should have done it! I begged him to lay off your dad. I told him my whole future depended on it."

"That isn't the worst." Anthea spoke even more gloomily. "Our clever parents went to Bradley's last night. When your dad backed the second dozen, mine would shoot the third. If yours bet on red, mine took black—and dad picked up three thousand dollars."

"That should have jollied yours up,"

Tom interjected. "It was an especially fine revenge, because mine is a bum loser."

"That's only the half of it," Anthea continued. "Your dad beat it in a rage, and mine stayed on and lost his three thou and the Lord only knows how much more. Anyway, every one at Palm Beach is talking about it this morning."

"Those two don't need chaperons. They need guardians—no, keepers," Tommy stated positively. "Well, I'm going to tackle John Waddington Spears this very morning!"

"It won't be the slightest use," Anthea mourned. "He told me at breakfast that if you had the face to turn up here, I could tell you he didn't want to see you—now or ever."

"He's going to see me, just the same," the boy said between clenched teeth.

Anthea looked at him, frank admiration in her eyes.

"You certainly have nerve, Tommy, my own," she said. "I'd as soon think of bidding no trumps on a Yarborough."

"And when he turns me down or throws me out, we'll get married," the boy continued. "You said you would," he added anxiously.

Anthea did not answer.

"You said you would," the boy repeated even more anxiously.

"I know I did," Anthea agreed. "It was a month away, though, at that time."

"Then you don't love me any more?"

"Tommy Weyman, you know I do! You're—you're a pig!" Anthea exclaimed indignantly.

"Well, will you?" he asked, his voice softening.

"Tommy, I will," she answered, and raised her eyes to his.

"Let me help you," he begged, as she started to pick up her bicycle.

Their heads were close together; the wheel slipped back to the sand again. Anthea's face was rosy red when she finally stood up.

"That was different from a petting kiss, Tommy," she sighed. "I—I liked it!"

V

"No!" said Mr. Spears testily. "No! No! I won't hear of an engagement. Anthea is much too young, and you—well, I don't know enough about you."

"You've known my father since before I was born," Tommy objected indignantly.

"As for me, sir, I've never done anything I'm ashamed of."

"I may have known your father before you were born, young man," Mr. Spears snapped back, "but that's no reason for letting *you* marry my daughter. Quite the contrary!"

"Is that your last word, sir?"

"Absolutely."

Tommy drifted thoughtfully into his father's suite at the Poinciana. He found his parent not entirely up—that is, the elder Weyman was shaving in the bathroom.

"Hello, dad!" the boy called.

"Thought you were coming on the early train. Did you motor down?" his father asked through the door.

"No—I came by train."

"What took you so long?"

"Anthea Spears met me, and then I went up to see her father."

From the bathroom came that smothered expletive which all men, no matter what their religious affiliations, use when they cut themselves with a safety razor. Then a voice:

"I don't care a great deal for Spears, Tom."

"Neither do I," his son retorted promptly; "but I *do* care a great deal about Anthea."

"H-m!" grunted the voice from the bathroom. "Usual thing, I suppose. Aren't you rather short on pride in that quarter?"

"Usual thing, only more so. I'm not short on pride—I haven't any at all, so far as Anthea is concerned."

Mr. Weyman came out of the bathroom and surveyed his son pityingly.

"You're too young to marry, Tom," he announced.

"So were you, dad," Tommy retorted; "but it didn't stop you, and it isn't going to stop me!"

VI

"I've got eleven hundred dollars," Tommy stated, as he guided Anthea deftly across the polished floor of the Coconut Grove. "Anybody can get married on that."

"We can, anyway," the girl answered bravely. "I'm ready to go with you whenever you say, Tommy, and we'll let the world talk—meaning Palm Beach—which they will, of course."

"All right!" he said, as the dance came to an end. "I'll get a car, and we'll go over to West Palm Beach. There must be some one who can perform marriages there. Couldn't be so many married people there otherwise."

"When shall we go?" she asked, her eyes bright as she looked up at him.

"I'll send you a note when and where to meet me," he replied. "I'll send it our way. I'll have to find out about licenses and things first, though."

Mrs. Spears was giving a dinner-bridge that evening—a kind of dissipation to which the real old guard at Palm Beach is much addicted. It appealed neither to Anthea nor to her father. Anthea considered that the old people played an execrable game, and bad bridge infuriated her. Mr. Spears thought that his wife's friends played too well, for he always lost at these functions, and was frequently reviled by his partners. Hence they both escaped to the porch while the servants were setting out tables and gravely removing wrappers from new decks of cards.

"How do you happen to be dining at home, daughter?" Mr. Spears asked, when his cigar was going nicely.

"I expect a note from Tommy," Anthea answered quietly.

"H-m!" he ejaculated.

He waited for the girl to speak further. She didn't, and he glanced at her with some annoyance. She kept twisting her fingers together, and it suddenly struck him that she looked a trifle wan. His heart smote him as he watched her.

"You know I haven't forbidden young Weyman the house, or—or anything like that," he broke the silence.

He paused expectantly, but Anthea made no remark.

"I don't want you to be unhappy, my dear," he continued. "You surely know that?"

Anthea continued to stare straight in front of her.

"You're both too young—that's the only objection. I don't want my little girl to ruin her life by taking a step she'll regret later."

Again he paused expectantly, but Anthea did not reply. She crossed her legs, cupped her chin in her hand, and gazed out over the sea.

John Waddington Spears lost his temper.

"Look here, I won't have you mooning away waiting for a note from that young cub! I won't have it! What kind of a note?"

"It's a very important note. It will influence my whole future," Anthea said in a dreamy voice.

"Important!" he snorted. "That boy never did anything important in his life. He ought to be playing marbles—and you ought to be playing with dolls. I'm thoroughly disgusted!"

A pink and white messenger boy came up the steps, hesitated, and spoke.

"Message for Miss Spears?" he said interrogatively.

"You sign for it, father," the girl said eagerly, and tore open the envelope.

Spears scribbled a hieroglyphic in the place the boy indicated. Then he turned to his daughter—and stared at her. Her cheeks had flushed crimson, her eyes were bright as stars, and her lips moved steadily. At last she looked up.

"Your correspondence is quite your own, my dear, of course," her father said gently; "but I am curious to know what—what so affects you. Perhaps if, between ourselves, we tried a new system—"

"A new system!" Anthea repeated. She glanced down at the slip of paper in her hand, and then up again. "Yes, a new system might help you, dad. I hear you weren't very successful with the one you used at Bradley's last night!"

With a laugh that carried a hint of hysteria, she turned and ran into the house, the note fluttering to the floor as it slipped from her hand.

"Impertinent minx!" Spears said aloud, and bent to pick up the piece of paper that she had dropped.

He had no intention of reading it, of course, but something odd about it caught his eye. He ventured a sidewise glance. It was all figures. Then he held it in his hand and frankly studied it. This is what he saw:

Bradley's, 10 P.M.—13-5-5-20, 13-5, 1-14-4, 23-5-12-12, 7-5-20, 13-1-18-18-9-5-4, 1-20, 23-5-19-20, 16-1-12-13, 2-5-1-3-8.
9, 12-15-22-5, 25-15-21.

20.

From bewilderment the man's expression suddenly changed to one of comprehension, and a broad grin spread over his face.

"The darned kids!" he said aloud. "The darned kids! And I was worrying

over them just as if they had been grown up! Tommy's going to buck roulette at Bradley's to-night, and they plan to elope on his winnings. I suppose he sent a copy of his system to Anthea, so that she could pull for him while he was playing. The darned kids! Well, I believe I'll go and watch the fun," he concluded, with a final chuckle.

He thrust the slip of paper into the side pocket of his dinner coat, and set out toward the Beach Club. As he approached the entrance to Bradley's, he saw a familiar figure in front of him.

"Hello, Weyman!" he hailed. "Your boy with you?"

"Oh, that you, Spears? Don't know where Tom is. Going to try your luck? Heard you didn't do so well after I left last night."

"No, I didn't," Spears answered shortly. "I intend to get it back, though."

"I'm going to get my three thou, too," Weyman stated grimly. "Tom says I'm a bad loser, and I guess I am. I don't like being rooked!"

"Going to use Tommy's system?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, those kids have got up a system, I understand. I suppose the idea is to break Bradley's and live happily ever after on the proceeds. I expected to see Tommy here to-night. He sent a copy of the system to Anthea. Here it is."

"Curious!" Weyman mused, examining the array of figures on the slip of paper Spears held out to him. "Never knew the boy went in for that sort of thing. He says gambling bores him—it's too slow. Prefers to drive a car, or dance. I say, Spears, let's try this thing! One system is as good as another."

Spears took up the slip of paper and studied it carefully.

"Bradley's, 10 P.M.," he read. "It's nearly that now. One hunch is as good as another. Let's try the dozens on the first lot, and then bet in full on the underlined numbers. I suppose that's what the underlining means."

"All right! Here goes," Weyman agreed, taking the chips an attendant handed him in exchange for a five-hundred-dollar bill. "First number, thirteen—that's in the second dozen."

The croupier spun the little ivory ball around the inside rim of the roulette wheel. For a moment it whirled madly about its

orbit, then slowed, clicked from number to number, to finally fall into the compartment marked "23."

"Guess you're right about playing the dozens. Twenty-three is in the second dozen, all right!" Weyman picked up his winnings. "Get aboard, Spears! Five comes next—first dozen."

The first dozen won with a seven. The next number on the system was a five again. On the wheel, two came up—the first dozen. Both men moved their chips to the second dozen, to correspond with twenty, the number that stood next on the slip of paper. This time twenty itself came up.

Spontaneously the two men turned and grinned at each other.

"On with the dance, let joy be—er—" said Mr. Spears.

"Unrefined," I believe, is the modern version." Mr. Weyman supplied the word for him. "Next number, thirteen—second dozen. Wonder if that comma before it means anything!"

They made their bets and leaned forward to watch the little white ball. It settled in the compartment marked "36."

"That comma *does* mean something," Weyman stated. "Wish that boy were here to tell us what! Let's lay off a bet, and watch."

The ball spun again. This time it stopped in thirteen.

"I've got it!" Spears exclaimed joyfully. "Commas mean to skip one play. Five is next—first dozen. Here goes!"

He pushed forward a pile of chips. Again the ball whirled about the roulette wheel, then settled in twelve.

"Told you so!" Spears announced triumphantly. "We've got something, Weyman—let's go to it!"

And they did.

It was about an hour later that they raised their flushed faces above huge ramparts of chips, and looked at each other.

"The first underlined number is nine. I'm going to bet a couple of hundred on it straight," Weyman said hoarsely.

"Same here," agreed Spears.

"Nine, red, first dozen, odd," the croupier chanted a moment later.

Twenty minutes passed, at the end of which Spears sat back and grinned beatifically at his companion.

"I'm cashing in," he said. "You'd better do the same."

"There's a twenty at the bottom of the sheet—not underlined, though," Weyman objected.

"Too late—the ball is stopping," Spears answered.

"Zero!" drowned the croupier.

Silently the two men counted their winnings, pushed their way through the admiring throng around the roulette table, and stepped to an open window, to wait for the checks that one of the proprietors himself was writing for them.

"Old fellow," said Spears affectionately, "this is one of the biggest killings, if not the biggest, that has ever been made at Palm Beach!"

"I wonder about that last number—the twenty at the bottom of the sheet." Weyman spoke with knitted brows. "It must have been put there for some purpose; yet the zero came up."

"My Lord!" Spears laughed. "Do you ask for more miracles than have taken place for us? What do you care what that

twenty means? It may have been just your boy's signature, bless him!"

Weyman glanced at the slip of paper, which he held in his hand.

"I guess I was born a hog," he laughed. "Maybe it is his signature, at that. Hold on! 'A' is one, 'b' is two—"

His lips moved as he counted silently.

"Why, 't' is the twentieth letter in the alphabet. Of course it's the foolish boy's signature!"

"In that case what does 13-5-5-20 mean, and all the rest of the numbers those kids strung together?" Spears rallied him happily.

Weyman did not answer. His lips were moving, and he was busy with a pencil. Spears bent forward, watching him, then gazed open-mouthed at the slip of paper that was held beneath his eyes. Between the rows of figures was written a translation into words, so that the message read:

Bradley's, 10 P.M.—Meet me and we'll get married at West Palm Beach. *I love you—T.*

THE HOUSE

I LOVE a house with cool and lofty rooms,
With sun-bright windows and still inner glooms,
With bare, smooth parquetry and mirrored walls,
And pillared loggias where the moonlight falls.

I love a hall with curving, carven stair;
A stately space for books; more gayly fair,
A patio inclosed to shut me in
With voice and viol, harp and violin.

There must be color, also, softly laid—
Warm ivory and amber, coral, jade,
Dim agate delicate as twilight mist,
And subtler tones of pearl and amethyst.

I love a garden facing my retreat
With singing fountains, faint and silver sweet;
And over it a high-hung gallery
Whence I may catch a shining glimpse of sea.

And there should be a ghost—a gentle wraith
Haunting remembered scenes of plighted faith,
Flitting about the pool when dusk enchants—
A link with ancient mystery and romance.

Behind my crystal barriers I would lean
To peep beyond the poplar's pointed screen
And watch the world wherein I wander not,
Like some sequestered Lady of Shalott.

Nelle Richmond Eberhart

The Hunter's Quarry

WHAT JEFF FERRELL FOUND IN THE SHADOW OF THE
SNOW-CLAD CASCADES

By Alexander Hull

TWO men sat in the jerry-built office of the sheriff of Summit County.

The walls, of fresh-cut, unfinished Douglas fir, heated by the August sun, gave forth the resinous odor of the lumberyard and the mill, the whir of whose saws could be heard through the open window and door—indeed, through the flimsy walls themselves. About the room, tacked to the siding, were numerous handbills, all bearing practically the same legend, which began with a grim "Wanted."

The older of the two men, bald but heavily whiskered, sat in a swivel chair at the desk, which also was cluttered up with papers—summonses, letters, instructions, bills of sale.

The other man was tall and sparely built, with the clean-cut features of the best type of young American manhood. His brown eyes were alert and slightly quizzical of expression. His hair, too, was brown, and he carried his head high, with a firm-set jaw.

He rose from his chair at the window, and, taking a photograph and some letters from the corner of the sheriff's desk, put them in his pocket, inadvertently displaying, as he did so, an official badge upon his vest.

The sheriff glanced up.

"That's all, I think," he said. "I'm glad to have met you, Ferrell. The fact that Gateson sent you is enough. As I say, although I doubt your information, you may be correct. I've played a good many hunches in my time, and not always to lose, either."

"If I'm wrong," replied the other, "it simply means a vacation."

"I'd put it that way, if I were you," said the sheriff. "Give Bogardus my letter, and he'll take you in. He'll keep his mouth

shut, too, if he happens to suspect anything. You'd better keep that photograph out of sight—that badge, too. And—go slow."

Ferrell nodded.

"That's about everything," ended the sheriff. "Caleb, the brother, is straight as a die—hasty in his ways, maybe, but a man to tie to. I told you that, though. There's his wife—she was Anne Barker—and there's a girl—her name's Anne, too. Bogardus will introduce you. If you stay by the fiction that it's fish and game, and lie low, you may land your man—though personally I think you're wrong. Barney Trent, you see, is wanted here, too, and he knows it. I don't see him putting his neck in a noose like that. However—"

Ferrell shook hands, went outside to his horse, mounted, and rode toward the east, where, massive and white against the sky, like the ramparts of the end of the earth, loomed a great peak. His destination lay at the base of it, thirty miles away.

For ten miles he rode slowly through the dust of the ascending valley road. The heat was intense. The glare of the sun seemed to be reflected back and down from the glaciers and snowfields of the mountain.

After a couple of hours, however, Ferrell left the clearings, which for some time had been growing smaller, and had been interspersed with brush and logged-off lands, and entered the deep forest, passing in a stone's throw from the heat of the tropics to the coolness of paradise. Before he had gone a hundred yards farther, a glacial stream brawled milkily and noisily against the road. He took a side trail to a spring to water his horse, and to remove the dust of the valley from his face.

Refreshed by the icy lavage and the short rest, he resumed his steady ascent of the plateau. All afternoon he rode through the

virginal timber, meeting no one until, an hour before dusk, he approached Bearview, a mountain town of a hundred and fifty inhabitants, the last outpost of civilization in its march against the gaunt fastnesses of the high Cascades. His goal lay two miles beyond the town.

He passed the first man he met with a greeting, and then, mindful of the sheriff's admonition, he unfastened the badge upon his vest and slipped it in his pocket. With that movement he became Jeff Ferrell, gentleman of comparative leisure, seeker after the waters where the trout were heaviest and gamiest, interested, perhaps, in tracking down a bear or treeing a cougar.

His saddle packs held his clothing. Two jointed rods and other paraphernalia of the angler's sport were packed among the clothes. Over the pommel of his saddle he carried his rifle. There was an automatic at his belt.

No one gave his weapons an eye as he rode through the little town. Half the men of the region traveled armed, not for protection, but on the chance that they might meet something worth shooting on the trail. Ferrell himself, however, they eyed with undisguised interest.

He dropped off at the store, introduced himself, and inquired for specific directions to Bogardus's place, explaining that he meant to fish there for a few weeks. About dark he arrived at the ranch, which lay in a draw on the flank of the mountain, and was hailed by his host.

In the morning Ferrell fished along a stream that ran by the Bogardus ranch. About half a mile down it he came upon a lovely pool, deep and black. On the farther side a basaltic scarp fell sheer to the water's edge from a height of fifty feet, extending, however, only half the length of the pool. Beyond the rock lay a meadow deep in clover, and beyond the meadow the house of the Trents—no, of Caleb Trent. Ferrell knew that he must divorce the brothers in his mind, for Caleb, the sheriff had said, was a good man, as straight as a die.

Ferrell stood looking for a long five minutes, motionless, absorbed in thought and conjecture. He remembered the advice that Jim Ely, the sheriff, had given him:

"And—go slow."

He withdrew his gaze from the Trent house, and scanned the water with a practiced eye. He had already a good catch; but he hadn't yet caught "that big one."

There was a black eddy just under the basalt, three feet from the far shore.

"He's there," said Ferrell to himself, with the calmness of certitude.

He changed his fly for the largest lure of barb and feather in his book. With a deft turn of his wrist, he dropped the bit of brown and crimson in the dead center of the eddy, where for an appreciable instant it floated high and dry.

The water parted to a leaping flash of green and silver. The line tautened, the bamboo curved into a springy arc.

"Lord!" said Ferrell devoutly. "Three pounds, if an ounce!"

II

WITHIN two weeks Ferrell was known by most of the people of the region as a man with some money and a great deal of leisure, who was an ardent devotee of the cult of Walton.

At the end of the second week, he met Anne Trent at a dance in Bearview—Anne Trent, straight and slender; Anne, with the laughing hazel eyes—clear eyes, candid eyes, sweet and tender eyes; Anne, with the proud, high head of red bronze, the fair, blossom skin, the arched brows, the curved mouth, the firm-set chin, and the look of breeding, tense and fine. She was easily conspicuous in the motley array of women at the dance. She would, indeed, have been conspicuous anywhere. There was a passionate loveliness about her, like a flame, before which other girls paled.

As she entered the room, Bogardus, at Ferrell's elbow, murmured:

"Anne Trent, Caleb's daughter. Some Eastern school—Bryn Mawr, I think. Not sure. She'll have ridden in, in breeches, and changed in the dressing room. Rides like a ranger. Handsome girl!"

"Lord, yes!" exclaimed Ferrell, fascinated. "She's—introduce me, will you?"

At the same instant, the eyes of Anne Trent and Ferrell met. There was something direct and appealing in that encounter. It was utterly free from indirection and subterfuge. It seemed as if Anne were saying to him, as if he were saying to her:

"You splendid creature! Are you really what you so wonderfully seem to be? If you are, this is, at last, the high adventure!"

All that in a glance!

Ferrell had had little to do with women. Shallow flirtations held no lure for him; few girls had ever deeply appealed to him.

He went through the polite forms of homage without conviction upon occasions when they became necessary. Anne Trent, he saw, was a being too sincere to fritter away her emotional treasures upon casual provocation. The encounter of their eyes startled him, made him keenly, electrically, alive. Upon the girl's face there appeared a faint and doubtful smile.

Like a flash of dark fire, the thought of Barney Trent leaped across Ferrell's mind. Only once—then he closed the doors to its recurrence. What had this girl to do with Barney Trent? The thought of connection, save the fortuitous one of relationship, was absurd!

His face lightened. With a hand upon Bogardus's arm, he propelled his host across the floor to meet her.

"Anne," said Bogardus amiably, "this is my boarder, Jeff Ferrell. Good rider—first-class fisherman—claims he can dance. I'm no judge myself, but I think the community ought to give him the once-over. You try him out. If he can't dance with you, he's the worst sort of a four-flusher!"

Laughing, Anne Trent gave Jeff Ferrell her hand. Again their eyes met; but now hers seemed to say:

"Wait! I know I have revealed to you a great deal—perhaps more than I should; but be content to wait. Let us not spoil something so lovely with rash haste. Do not hurry me. If it is true, we can afford to wait!"

Ferrell, knowing why he was here, knowing how fragile a thing is the forced bloom of love, was content to wait, and he let his eyes say as much to her.

"Your father in to-night, Anne?" asked Bogardus.

A cloud darkened her face. For an instant her eyes seemed veiled by its shadow. Then her face cleared.

"I think," she answered, "that he'll be in later. If he doesn't come—"

"I shall, of course, hope that he won't," said Ferrell gravely; "providing it's nothing serious that's keeping him away."

"Nothing serious," she repeated; but the cloud had come again.

"And if you have another escort, I shall hope that something direful and decisive happens to him during the evening."

"No other escort to-night," she confessed, smiling.

"Then—"

"Then consider it settled—consider it

settled!" broke in Bogardus, chuckling. "What's the use of words? I saw you had it all fixed before we crossed the floor."

And he retired, wreathed in sly humor and self-congratulation over his remarkable penetration.

III

As they neared the Trent house late that night, a one-seated rig slipped from the lane and passed them. The face of the driver was turned away, almost, it seemed, as if he were seeking to avoid recognition. It was a vain attempt, however, for Doc Twiller's gray horses were known in a radius of forty miles. The man himself, gaunt and angular, the stuff of a cartoon in his every line, defied disguise. The countryside knew him affectionately as "Doc Mutt."

Anne held up her horse.

"Anything wrong?" she asked anxiously.

For a moment it appeared that the doctor would drive by without reply. Then he drew rein.

"Oh, it's you!" he said, in high, piping tones. "Hello, Ferrell! No—nothing at all. Just making a friendly call on Caleb. Had a few games of cards. Got late. Good night!"

And he drove on.

Anne wheeled in at the open gateway.

"I won't ask you in to-night," she said. "But another day—"

"To-morrow," said Ferrell firmly.

"Perhaps—to-morrow," she conceded.

As she wheeled past the porch, Ferrell, standing to watch her out of sight in the white moonlight, saw the door of the house open, and saw a man standing in it, so that the light from within illuminated his face. A word, inaudible to Ferrell, passed between Anne and the man. She turned and waved good night. Ferrell returned her gesture mechanically. The door closed. Anne rode around the house toward the stable.

"So that was Caleb Trent!" murmured Ferrell, as he rode away. "A good man—as straight as a die. And, good God, he looks enough like his brother Barney!"

The morning was heavily overcast, and a cold wind was blowing from the snow fields. Few fish struck at Ferrell's lures, but those that rose were heavy, and fought furiously. He moved slowly down stream, reaching the pool from which the house of the Trents was visible about ten o'clock. With a pair of binoculars, which he carried

constantly with him, he ventured to observe the place closely.

As he watched, a man came from the door. With an exclamation, Ferrell recognized the lank form of Doc Twiller. The doctor was carrying something in his hands—apparently a case of instruments, which he stowed in his buggy. Untying his horses, he climbed to his seat and drove off.

Ferrell's eyes narrowed in thought. It had been cards last night. It could scarcely be cards now. Still, the thing was not unusual. Cards until one o'clock, mixed probably with something to eat and something to drink and a good deal to smoke—a professional recall for the player of the night before wasn't so unlikely. Probably it wouldn't have occurred to Ferrell to wonder about it, if Doc Twiller, normally the most friendly and effusive of souls, hadn't seemed so reluctant to face his greeting the night before. Moreover, any incident might be a clew—he could afford to overlook not one. At present this one led nowhere; but Ferrell dropped it into the storeroom of his memory.

IV

ABOUT three o'clock that afternoon Ferrell rode over to the Trent ranch. It was evident that Anne had seen him coming, for, as he approached, she came from the house and met him in the yard.

"It's a beautiful afternoon for riding," she declared. "I have to go into Bearview. Would you care to ride with me?"

"Very much!"

"Then, if you'll come in for a few moments, while I get ready," she said, "I'll introduce you to father and mother."

"There's no one ill, then?"

"Ill? What do you mean?"

The obvious way of averting all suspicion of an abnormal interest, he thought, was the expression of a normal one.

"I saw Doc Twiller coming from the house this morning, while I was fishing," he said. "I was afraid that some one—"

"No—we are all well."

"The doctor appeared to have his bag, and naturally—"

After a perceptible hesitation, the girl replied:

"He—he forgot it last night, and had to come back. He was very much put out."

"I shouldn't wonder," smiled Ferrell. "I'm very glad nothing is wrong."

"Nothing," she repeated.

Both his own instinct and her manner convinced him that Anne had relied upon invention, not truth; but he let no sign of his skepticism appear.

They entered the house, turning from a long hallway into a room at the right. It was a large room, with an open fireplace to hold a four-foot cut of wood. It was not in any sense of the word a typical room of that region, however. It was overfurnished rather than underfurnished, for in it were at least a dozen chairs, two tables, two large cases of books, and an old ebony square piano—still in valiant service, apparently, for upon its rack were a thin volume of Chopin's "Études" and a book of Beethoven sonatas. There were five or six pictures on the high walls—decidedly sophisticated pictures. The room was, in short, precisely the sort of background from which one would expect to see a girl like Anne Trent emerge.

Two figures—no, three. The third—a beautiful collie—rose as Anne and Ferrell entered.

"My mother," said Anne.

Ferrell bowed to the elderly woman, who smiled at him uncertainly.

"And my—father," said Anne.

Ferrell advanced cordially and extended his hand. Caleb Trent returned the pressure and the greeting. The situation was simple in the extreme, and yet there ensued, unaccountably, a long silence.

The four protagonists remained standing. Ferrell was conscious of a submerged current of excitement in the atmosphere, which very quickly communicated itself to his body. Suddenly the tension broke.

"Mr. Ferrell is going to ride into town with me," explained Anne. "I'll be down in a minute or two."

The three of them watched her out of the room.

"Sit down, Mr. Ferrell," said Mrs. Trent. "Anne's two minutes will probably be five, at least—perhaps fifteen."

"You have a beautiful place," said Ferrell perfunctorily, as he took a chair.

Caleb Trent—for the remark was addressed to him—nodded indifferently.

"Good enough," he admitted, lapsing into silence.

Silence was a thing which had no terrors for Ferrell. He began to think. First, that Caleb Trent was a very dour and unpleasant individual, despite his "straightness," despite his relationship to the divine Anne.

Second, that Mrs. Trent had certainly been weeping only a few moments before, and that she was discreetly sitting in a remote and shadowy corner of the big room in order to conceal that fact. Lastly, that Anne had lied to him, and had lied as ineptly as a girl of her superlative honesty always would lie.

Instinctively, he felt that his quest was ended, that Barney Trent was here, having come, in all probability, only yesterday—a fact that contained the explanation of the events of the preceding evening, and of the constraint, the poorly concealed embarrassment, of the elder Trents to-day. They were, they considered, bound to let the ties of blood come before those of justice. This was a viewpoint with which, although he had every reason to hate Barney Trent, Ferrell theoretically agreed.

Moreover, the complication struck still deeper into his heart. He had fallen, or was fast falling, in love with Anne. The future was clouded by doubt in his ability to make her understand, or forgive, the other compulsion under which he must act. That his quarry was here, however, he considered certain.

Doc Twiller's two calls complicated the situation somewhat at first sight, but in the end they might possibly mean the clearing of it. If Barney Trent were so ill, if a sterner and more inexorable hand than Ferrell's were dealing with him, then—

His thoughts were dispersed by Mrs. Trent's pleasant voice asking him if he liked the country.

"Very much," he told her. "The fishing is fine. The very day I arrived—"

As he was talking, the collie, which had been lying on the floor watching him, rose and came slowly to his chair. There, standing before him, the dog's deep brown eyes probed the depths of his being in lucid judgment, and passed him. The long, sharp nose nuzzled at his hand; the plummy tail swayed in gentle acceptance of his caress.

"What a beautiful dog!" he exclaimed. "What do you call him?"

"Duncan," said Mrs. Trent.

The dog turned away and moved back to his place on the floor, circling Caleb Trent's chair in a wide arc. Ferrell was idly noticing. Trent, also observing, flushed oddly. He pursed his lips to a low whistle.

"Dunk!" he said. "Here, Dunk!"

He stretched his hand toward the dog, and the response was immediate and unex-

pected. Down the dog's spine the hair rose, bristling; the animal's thin lips parted in a warning snarl. Then, slowly and stiffly, Duncan walked on.

Caleb Trent laughed in an uneasy, shamed way.

"He was disobedient yesterday," he remarked to Ferrell, "and I rather thoughtlessly touched him up with a whip. He hasn't forgiven me. I shouldn't have done it, I suppose."

"No, it's always a mistake to whip a collie," agreed Ferrell.

At that moment the door opened, and Anne Trent appeared.

"I'm ready now, Mr. Ferrell, if you are," she said.

Ferrell rose, made his adieu to the girl's parents, and went out with Anne. The occurrences of the past quarter of an hour he put resolutely from his mind. He meant to make what progress he could with Anne before the cataclysm. If he could win her first, then—

The air was keen and scented with the ineffable odors of forest and stream. The clouds of the overcast morning were gone, and the earth was bathed in an intense and golden light, sparkling, intoxicating. He devoted himself frankly to forgetting, and to making Anne forget, with such success that long before they came down the valley to Bearview they were both laughing as if the world had neither a snare nor any ugly thing in it.

V

On the following afternoon Ferrell rode up to the big house, studying the building as he drew near. It was built like a T, with the central stroke three stories in height, and the cross stroke only two. Lying, as it did, at the foot of a pass through the Cascades, it was an immense house with accommodations for a capacious hospitality—which, no doubt, in the early days, before the railways closed the pass to transcontinental travel, had often been taxed. It was obvious that the Trents made no pretense of occupying more than a small part of it.

For a moment Ferrell debated the advisability of a nocturnal entrance, only to dismiss it at once as too dangerous. Still, the notion tempted him. Barney Trent undoubtedly was concealed somewhere in that house—for a guess, in one of the rooms opening off the corridor of the main hall on the third floor.

He saw nothing of Anne's father that afternoon, and little of her mother—which was, of course, as he would have had it. The girl, he already knew, was sufficient for him. She seemed to be the answer to the riddle of his existence. He had always leaned toward a mild fatalism in his beliefs, and now it seemed accentuated.

She played for him, not brilliantly, perhaps, but correctly and sincerely. Without affectation, she made of music what he most desired to find in music, and he told her so. They talked of books, of the monstrous castellated peak behind them, dominating the land for a radius of a hundred miles or more, and of her school days in the East, which Ferrell matched with memories of his own. Through it all he had a feeling that this was but temporizing, that the end was inevitable. Anne Trent was made for him, and he for her—else there was no meaning to the page of life at all.

He left at five o'clock. About nine that evening, with an excuse to Bogardus, he saddled his horse and again rode down the stream toward the Trent house. He was uncertain what he meant to do. Perhaps he merely wanted to be nearer the girl who so perilously and sweetly occupied so much of his waking thought. Perhaps the third floor of the house, and not the girl, was intriguing him.

Tying his horse a quarter of a mile from the house, he walked on slowly, pausing now and then to listen for sounds of other nocturnal prowlers. In the big living room there was a light, but if there was one on the third floor the windows were barred to its escape.

He moved stealthily into the yard. He had no excuse to offer for so late a visit, if he should be seen. Duncan, the collie, too, was to be guarded against.

He reached a clump of shrubbery. Not a sound was audible.

There was an intermittent moon, and by its diffused light he could see that for an athletic man it would be no trick at all to scale the west wing of the house and step upon the balcony of the third floor. If, as he believed, that side of the house was not in use, it might be done with impunity; but to what purpose? If Barney Trent was within, the windows and doors would be secured against intrusion. Nevertheless, it was worth trying.

At the third step from his concealment the sound of voices sent him back into the

bushes in a single bound. A door had opened in the wing, and a man emerged. Ferrell caught the high, falsetto tones of Doc Twiller.

"A close shave—out of danger—two or three weeks, and—"

"By God, doc, if you spill this!" interrupted some one inside.

"Not a word!" protested Twiller. "You can count on me. A tombstun has nothing on me. You needn't be afraid."

"Afraid!" echoed the other contemptuously, and Ferrell recognized the voice of Caleb Trent. "Doc, I don't scare easy; but as for you, watch your step, or—good night!"

Twiller responded, and stumbled out toward the stable, where Ferrell heard him get into his buggy. There was a clatter of warped wheels, diminishing in the distance, and the doctor was gone. Ferrell turned from his absorption in these sounds and looked again toward the house.

His heart leaped wildly to his throat, and seemed to stick there. Not six feet from him stood the figure of a man!

It seemed impossible to Ferrell that the throb of his heart couldn't be heard at that distance. It seemed impossible, too, that the man should not see him, for he was facing the watcher. The moon, thank God, was for the moment obscured.

The man stirred, breathed heavily, and moved slowly toward the house. Ferrell saw that it was the girl's father, who had come out while Ferrell was absorbed in the departing sounds of Doc Twiller's rig.

Trent reached the porch, walked resoundingly the length of it, and noisily closed the door as he reentered the house.

Ferrell presently regained the road, and walked rapidly to the bridge where he had tied his horse. Trent's words echoed again and again in his mind:

"By God, doc, if you spill this!"

A threat—it could be naught else; and uttered in the tone of a man who would fulfill it, too. Yet, by the sheriff's word, Caleb Trent was not a violent man. Hasty? Yes, the sheriff had admitted that; but this was not the tone of hasty emotion. It was the cold, venomous, considered threat of a man who premeditated a terrible revenge if his warning went unheeded.

Did Caleb, then, love his brother so well that he was willing to do violence to protect him from his just deserts? Anne seemed very far away and unattainable to

Ferrell just then, for, whether he might win her or not, he must get his man! No love could turn him from that intent.

VI

ONE morning, high up on the summit trail, near the timber line, at the edge of an alpine meadow, Ferrell came upon Anne Trent, crying bitterly.

The trail to this point had been good, but here, he had been warned, the easy going ended, and farther ascent must be made on foot. All morning he had climbed steadily, seeing no one; and now he had come upon the one being whom he most wished to see.

Her horse was tethered to a little tree no higher than a tall man, but perhaps centuries old. As he dropped off beside her, she dried her eyes hastily.

"You'll think me a very silly creature," she said.

"Not at all!"

"Early Victorian—schoolgirlish. Girls don't cry any more."

"No?"

"You know they don't!"

"I know nothing of the kind. I've seen them do it. After all, I think girls are very much as they always were, in spite of certain external differences. If you're crying, I'm sure you must have a very good reason for it."

"Thank you for the comfort!" Then she added earnestly: "It's a schoolgirlish trick to apologize, too; but I'm going to do it. I don't want you to think that I am really—overemotional. I'm not. I think I am usually fairly level-headed and matter-of-fact. I want you to know that I—well, it's this. I have been undergoing a strain of which you know nothing—of which, just now, I can tell you nothing; and for the moment it has made me—not quite myself."

"Believe me," said Ferrell gravely, "I understand."

"I want you," she went on bravely, "to think the best of me."

"I do."

"Thank you." Then, abruptly, she asked: "You've brought your lunch, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"How absolutely jolly that we should meet like this, without expecting it! I have mine, too. Shall we climb up Bender's Spur? There's a shelter there, with the

most superb view, and we can lunch there and ride home together."

"By all means!"

They were an hour reaching the lofty rock shelter.

"Farther on," said Anne, "it's rather dangerous. No one climbs the mountain from this side, except occasionally a guide."

They sank down to rest, and there stole over them a feeling of other-worldness. It was as if two struggling souls had attained Olympus and become a new race, the first of the gods.

Miles below them lay the old world that they had left, swimming in hazy light. Peak after peak lifted from the green valleys, striving toward heaven and falling far short. Bands and buttons of silver, which were rivers and lakes, lay like jewels upon the deep and distant bosom of the earth. Above them rose the massive summit of the great peak, white, faintly tinged with icy blue. About them were the eternal rocks and snows and fields of the ephemeral alpine flowers—gentian, lupine, heather, and avalanche lilies—clinging to their fleeting, honey-sweet life.

Ferrell put his hand over the hand of the girl beside him. Slowly she turned her face from the ranges and valleys below, and her eyes met his. There was in them something tender and sweet, something waiting and hushed and holy, something that utterly passed words. They did not waver or close. A faint and lovely smile curved her lips, and she seemed, without actually moving, to lean toward him.

"Anne," murmured Ferrell, "I love you!"

VII

It was near dark when they rode into the yard of the Trent ranch. Caleb Trent was standing beside the porch, his horse saddled. He watched them coming up the yard intently, and, it seemed to Ferrell, sardonically. Why? Ferrell could not fathom the reason, but if Trent chose to take that line, it would matter little.

They swung from their horses and replied to Caleb's greeting. Ferrell said at once:

"Mr. Trent, I am happy to say that your daughter has consented to marry me."

Caleb Trent raised his eyebrows. The smile that broke out upon his face was now, absolutely without question, sardonic. Despite the fact that he was Anne's father,

Ferrell had never warmed to the man. Grant that he was under a strain, that he was guarding his brother's life—grant him any excuse, and there remained a residuum that Ferrell could not quite stomach. The man awakened an instinctive hostility.

Trent laughed, however, and extended his hand cordially enough.

"Fine—fine and dandy!" he exclaimed. "Anne's a girl in a million—aren't you, Anne? And you, if you're the man you seem—"

"I shall want to talk to you about that," said Ferrell.

Trent nodded.

"To-morrow afternoon—say three o'clock? Just now I'm off for the evening. Sorry to go at such a time, but you'll stay for supper, I hope? Anne and her mother, I'm sure, will be glad to entertain you, and I've no doubt they'll do it very acceptably without—me."

Incredible as it seemed, there was certainly a note of irony running through that speech. A good man Caleb Trent might be, and straight as a dozen dies, but Ferrell didn't like him, and knew that he never would.

"Well, my dear," said Trent, flinging an arm about Anne's shoulders, "haven't you a kiss for your old dad? Or are you saving them all for Ferrell now?"

Then it seemed clear to Ferrell that Anne had been crying that morning because she and Caleb Trent had quarreled. Anne had not yet forgiven her father, and he knew it—therefore his sardonic smile. As Trent put his face to hers, the girl visibly stiffened in every muscle; and, while he kissed her warmly enough, she did not kiss him. Moreover, she emerged from the embrace with her face flushed scarlet, and the banner, Ferrell would have sworn, was that of anger.

What was it all about? Barney? Whatever it was, Anne was in the right of it—he knew that!

Trent laughed, nodded, and mounted his horse. With a wave of his hand, he was off.

Ferrell turned to Anne. Her face was no longer flushed. Her eyes were sweet and bright.

"Come in—Jeff," she said softly.

He left at nine o'clock. The night was brilliant with moonlight, in which the great snowy peak was illuminated, high, remote

and cold. Ferrell fell to reflecting how fleeting were the ways of men, reckoned with the ways of mountains, and how little his own problems, so instinct with joy and sorrow, mattered beyond the confines of human society. Men were midges on the mountain's base—no more!

At the bridge he halted and tied his horse. Despite his decision to have done with spying, something inexorable drew him back. It was time that the drama should come to its bitter end. It was at least time that he should find out definitely whether the sick man was Barney Trent.

Near the gate he met Duncan, and spoke to him softly. The dog made friends at once, accepting his stealthiness as legitimate. Ferrell cautiously circled the house, and paused by a lilac tree.

On the gallery of the third floor two figures were plainly revealed in the moonlight. One was Anne Trent; the other must be her uncle, Barney Trent, the man whom Ferrell wanted. They were walking slowly to and fro, Barney leaning on a cane on one side, and on the other supported by Anne's firm young muscles. It was evident that the man was very weak, and it was no less evident that in the support of the girl there was a world of tenderness and solicitude.

For five minutes Ferrell watched them, perplexed, at sea. He could not distinguish the words of their conversation. They went into the house. Ferrell went through the darkness to his horse.

Strange! The tenderness she seemed to deny to her father, Anne lavished upon her uncle, a murderer and a fugitive from justice!

Puzzled, undecided, Ferrell rode rapidly back to the Bogardus ranch. Should he act without warning Anne of his intention? It would be fatal to his chances of winning her, if he did; and yet there was no alternative! He must!

Bogardus rose from the telephone as Ferrell entered the house.

"Been talking with Jack Curry over at Elton," he remarked. "Your young lady's estimable male parent, it seems, has been conducting himself quite naughtily. Rode into Elton this evening, had a couple of shots of squirrel hooch, and beat up Tod Brown, the hardware man. Did a good job of it, too, they tell me."

Ferrell grinned.

"I thought he was a peaceable man."

"Well," said Bogardus, "he is, most gen-

erally. First time I've known him to break out. Tod must have done something mighty riling to get him started—unless it was that hooch. Some of that stuff, you know, will make a jack rabbit think he's a cougar."

"I rather object," said Ferrell, "to your calling my prospective father-in-law a jack rabbit!"

"Yes," admitted Bogardus, "that's going a little too far, I reckon; but I'll say this—in twenty years I've never known Caleb to get in a fight. Must be something preying on him. He acts sort of queer these days, anyway. Met him a few days ago, and I swear to the Lord I haven't done one solitary thing to him, but he acted as if he suspicioned me of stealing his chickens and was afraid to say so. Hardly more than half spoke to me—turned down a joke flat—rode right on his way. Something's on his mind, that's sure!"

"Worrying over Anne liking me, probably," suggested Ferrell.

"You? Hell, no! You're all right, Ferrell. You're just Caleb's sort of a man!"

Ferrell said good night, and went out into the hall. Halfway upstairs, with all the force of a sudden shot, an idea struck him.

"My God!" he exclaimed, staring wide-eyed into the darkness.

VIII

TRENT and Ferrell sat alone in the big living room of the Trent house on the following afternoon. Ferrell, as he came into the house, had seen no one about but Trent himself. His host had been cordial enough; his sardonic tone of the preceding day was gone. In response to Ferrell's brief statement, he nodded affably.

"If there are any questions you wish to ask," pursued Ferrell, playing out the drama gravely, "I shall be glad to reply to them. I can refer you, for my financial status, to the First National Bank of my city."

Trent waved him aside.

"Perfectly satisfied, I'm sure."

"Then—may I tell you a story, Mr. Trent?"

"Certainly," responded Trent, lighting a cigarette.

"With your permission. My parents died when I was very young, and I was brought up by a guardian—a man who had been my father's intimate, and who, from

the day of my parents' death, was both father and friend to me. Of that man's broadness, benevolence, and kindness I could not hope to tell you. Until my twenty-third year we were always together. I respected him more than any other man, I think, in the world. He was a good man in the best sense of the word. I never knew him to do a mean or dishonorable thing. After my twenty-third birthday, however, the hazards of business kept us apart. I saw him perhaps once or twice a year. Three months ago"—Ferrell paused—"three months ago my friend and benefactor was murdered."

The casual air which Trent had worn for the past half hour was gone now. Despite the fact that his eyes did not meet Ferrell's, the latter saw that he was none the less intent upon the story.

"I'll make it as short as possible," continued Ferrell. "He was cruelly and foully murdered, in cold blood, by a man whose shady career in blue-sky stock-selling he had ended. That man lured him to a secluded spot, and deliberately murdered him for revenge."

Trent's cigarette had gone out. It hung by the paper between the set teeth of the man, almost bitten through.

"Perhaps you know the end of that story. The criminal escaped. No one knew where he had gone. The efforts of the local police were perfunctory. Except for one young man, who had a personal interest in the case, and who possessed enough political influence to have himself officially identified with the forces of justice—except, I say, for this man, it is probable that the criminal would never have been traced. I am that man, and the murderer's name was Barney Trent."

Caleb Trent was not looking at him even now. There was in the big room the silence of death. Ferrell could not have sworn, intently as he was looking at the other man, that Trent was actually breathing. Life, for a perceptible instant, seemed to have been utterly suspended.

"Mr. Trent," said Ferrell evenly, "I have every reason to believe that Barney Trent fled to his boyhood home, where he meant to hide until such time as the opportunity for an ultimate escape presented itself; and that at the present moment this house shelters him!"

Out of the silence came a whisper.

"You must be crazy!"

"I am not crazy," said Ferrell coldly. The last vestige of doubt had disappeared. He rose to his feet. "Barney Trent," he cried, his voice ringing through the spacious living room, "I arrest you for the murder of—"

"By God, no!" cried Trent, and, seemingly without crouching for a spring, he sprang sidewise, striking as he did so.

Ferrell's solitary shot went wide. A hot pain seared his arm as Barney Trent's blow went home. The weapon clattered to the floor beneath the table.

For an instant Ferrell's balance was lost, and he clung to his assailant in a clinch. With difficulty he released himself, and in the rebound stumbled against the chair behind him. In the second while he was recovering, Barney was between him and the table, already bending to reach the weapon that would terminate the fight.

Ferrell sprang upon him, only just in time, and bore him away from the table into the big center space of the room. There was a fierce interchange of blows. Trent had no boxing skill, and within two minutes he was breathing heavily, showing signs of distress.

Ferrell pressed him harder. Trent, backing away, brought up against the square piano, upon the corner of which stood a plaster cast. One hand closed upon this, while the other came up over his eyes, as if he were dazed and trying to get a clear vision of his antagonist.

Ferrell, not noting the hand on the bust, but only the signs of distress, stepped closer as he prepared to swing. The plaster cast, thrown with the violence of despair, crashed through his guard and struck the side of his head. Succeeding the shock of the blow, he felt a cloud of intense blackness settling down over him. With a supreme effort of will he fought it off, and instinctively staggered between Trent and the fatal table. With a sweep of his arm, Trent toppled him to the floor.

With the blood singing in his ears, fighting desperately to fend off unconsciousness, Ferrell struggled again to his feet. While his muscular coördinations seemed disconnected, his mind was still reasonably clear. It was clear enough to take in several things at once—that Trent was bending to get the pistol from beneath the table; that Anne and her father, the sick man, were standing in the door leading to the hall; and that this would in all probability be Ferrell's

last sight of her, or of anything in the land of the living.

Then her voice rang clear.

"Take him, Dunk—take him!"

As Barney Trent came up with the pistol in his hand, the big collie leaped and caught his wrist. Strange thing in a collie, whose method of fighting is to slash and slash again—he clung.

Trent screamed, staggered at the impact. There was a sickening crunch of breaking bone. The nerveless fingers parted. The pistol dropped. As it struck, there was a report. Barney, with the dog upon him, went soundlessly to the floor.

As if through the direct intervention of Providence, the bullet of the accidental discharge had found its mark in the murderer's heart.

What Ferrell had merely suspected was clear—that Barney Trent had come to the old house, and, finding his brother injured, on the night of his arrival, by a severe fall from a horse, he had terrified, cajoled, and threatened Anne, her mother, and Doc Twiller into acquiescing in his playing the rôle of Caleb, his brother. He had not suspected Ferrell, supposing that it was merely admiration for Anne that drew the young stranger to the house. He had believed himself to be entirely safe for a few weeks while he was perfecting his plans to escape to the Orient.

When Ferrell's story was told, Anne, crossing over to him, put her hand upon his shoulder.

"I am sorry—deeply sorry—that it had to be," she said; "but we have no blame for you—none."

"None," echoed Caleb Trent. "Barney was always a man of violent passions, and utterly ungovernable. Wherever he has gone, he has left a trail of bitterness. I have been thinking—and I like to think of it so—that it is as if all the evil traits of generations of Trents had come to seed in Barney, and that now, with him, they will sleep forever. For you, as Anne says, there can be no blame. Please know that we feel that."

It was the one thing of which Ferrell had wished to be assured. A great load was suddenly lifted from his heart. Still faint from the heavy blow upon his head, he looked at Anne Trent, who was leaning toward him, her eyes bright and wet with pity and love.

Who Is Bronson Gurney?

THE CURIOUS MYSTERY THAT PUZZLED THE TOWN OF FAIRPORT

By Grace Tyler Pratt

Author of "The Bainbridge Mystery," etc.

ELIZA CARTER, who tells the story, lives in the old Gurney house, in the seaside town of Fairport. Richard Gurney, former owner of the house, bequeathed his property to his son Bronson, who had disappeared several years before, on condition that the young man should return to claim it by a certain date. If he fails to do so, the estate is to go to a cousin, Jaquith Gurney, an old bachelor.

About a year before the date named in the will, a young man comes to Fairport, announces himself as Bronson Gurney, and takes up his quarters with Miss Carter—who has two other boarders, Dr. Thorn, a young physician not long settled in the town, and Sylvia Brewster, a teacher at the Fairport Academy. The newcomer is generally accepted as the son of Richard Gurney, but old Jaquith stoutly denies his claim. He takes the case to court, asking for an injunction to prevent the Gurney trustees from transferring the estate to Jaquith. Judge Stone refuses the injunction, without undertaking to settle the question of the plaintiff's identity.

One evening young Gurney—to give him the name he claims—goes to see his cousin, saying that he hopes to bring the old man to reason. On returning, he reports that Jaquith refused to let him in. The next day a neighbor, Mrs. Chester Peabody, goes to the old man's house and finds it closed and apparently empty. She informs Dr. Thorn, who decides to investigate, and asks Miss Carter to accompany him.

X

I WAS so much taken aback by Dr. Thorn's request that I came near getting right into his carriage without one word; but somehow I did have the sense to remember that this was my night for looking after Mrs. Flynn, the sick woman to whom the Congregational minister was attending. When I explained this to Dr. Thorn, he said without even a moment's hesitation:

"Then, Miss Brewster, I shall have to ask you to come." As if something else had occurred to him, he turned to Mrs. Peabody. "I know that you must be very tired, but I am going to ask if you, too, will go with me," he said.

Mrs. Chester Peabody is one of those persons who seem to be always ready for anything. Without a moment's hesitation she replied that if she might first go home for a few minutes, she would be ready. I saw from her manner that she did not consider it at all fitting for Sylvia and the doctor to go off alone.

Knowing Sylvia's resentment toward Dr. Thorn, I feared that she might be the stumblingblock to the expedition; but one can generally count on her for doing the unexpected, and she did not surprise me very much by saying that she would be ready at once.

It was with a little amusement that, perhaps half an hour later, I watched the three drive off.

After they had gone, I left my chief assistant, Mary Andrews, to do the supper dishes, and started forth for my half of the night with Mrs. Flynn.

At twelve o'clock another volunteer came to relieve me, and I went home. As the house loomed up before me in the darkness, I saw that the only light left burning was in Sylvia Brewster's room. She was sitting up, waiting for me. As soon as she heard me come up to my room, she hurried in to tell me the result of their investigations.

She said that when they arrived at Jaquith Gurney's weather-beaten, dreary old house, they had found it as Mrs. Peabody had described. It was securely locked up,

and their repeated rings and raps at different doors had produced no response except echoes. Then Dr. Thorn had found a place at the back, where he could force an entrance, and they had gone in and found the house deserted.

She told how neat it all looked—everywhere. Jaquith's bed was nicely made, but there was nothing to tell when it had been slept in. Everything downstairs was in perfect order, too. The clock in the kitchen and the one in the hall had both stopped at one o'clock, but whether it was that day or not there was no way of telling. Everything about the place looked, she said, as if Jaquith had just stepped out for a few minutes.

When I asked Sylvia what the doctor thought, she said that he had carefully searched every room in the house, hoping to find some clew.

"A clew to what?" I asked.

"Why, to the reason for Mr. Gurney's disappearance," said Sylvia. "Dr. Thorn couldn't have been any more interested if he had been searching for the germ of some new disease. He was so absorbed that he hardly gave me a word all the time we were there."

When I asked if he was at home now, she said that he had gone out to make inquiries, in hope of discovering Jaquith's whereabouts. He wanted to know who had seen the old man last, and, if necessary, to report his disappearance to the proper authorities.

As I looked at Sylvia, I wondered if it was the moonlight that made her look so pale. She seemed to know what I was thinking, as she often has a way of doing, for she said:

"My ghostly looks are the result of Dr. Thorn's professional tension. He couldn't have appeared more serious if he had had a critical case of typhoid fever on his hands. If he had talked more, it wouldn't have seemed so weird."

I caught something of her feeling. After I had gone to bed, I lay there waiting to hear the doctor's latchkey, with my teeth all but chattering in my head. Then, as unconsciousness crept over me, all my fears evaporated, and I went off to sleep under the comforting delusion that Jaquith had gone off huckleberrying.

That night I dreamed of him. The old man was saying to me in his courteous, formal way:

"Huckleberry bushes do not bear fruit in November, madam. The huckleberries are all dead—dead—dead!"

The next morning the whole village knew that Jaquith Gurney was missing, and almost every one in it was looking for him.

The retiring Jaquith had never aroused so much interest before. No one had been in the habit of spending a thought on his whereabouts. If it hadn't been for Mrs. Chester Peabody's attempted call on him, he might have dropped out of the village for days and weeks without having his absence noted by any one.

He had no intimate friends on whom he made calls. One of the few walks he took was to the village cemetery, where he was occasionally seen. A young boy, who was taking a short cut through the cemetery the Saturday before, remembered seeing him there then. He said that the old man was poking dead leaves with his cane in order that he might read the dates and inscriptions on a Gurney gravestone.

One person was found who had seen him later than that—Mrs. John Breck, his neighbor, from whom he was in the habit of buying milk now and then. She said that she thought, for the most part, he used condensed milk, but that occasionally—once or twice a week—he would come in and buy some from her. On the Sunday before, about eight o'clock in the morning, he had been over to buy a pint of milk. As was his custom, he made no remarks, aside from the brief ones of his errand, and she had noticed nothing unusual about him.

None of the villagers could be found who had seen him later than that Sunday morning. Of course I knew of some who had, but I decided that this was a thing which concerned that person himself, and which was no affair of mine; so I kept my mouth sealed regarding that episode.

During that first day of search a telegram was sent to the deaf housekeeper in Detroit, on the chance that Jaquith might have told her about some intended trip. She replied immediately, in a message so worded that it plainly showed her concern for the old man, that she knew of no visit he had intended to make, and that in all the years she had kept house for him she had never known of his staying away overnight.

Then Jaquith's house was thoroughly searched again for some suggestion that

might give a clew to his whereabouts. There was not a trace of anything that gave even a hint. The gloomy old pine trees, which stood in a long row in the yard, waved their dark branches in a way which seemed to advise the searchers to look somewhere else. I remember that as I looked at the trees one afternoon, I wished they could speak out and tell when and under what circumstances they had last seen Jaquith Gurney go out from those doors.

After a few days of inquiry, the town seemed to have exhausted its resources. Then the selectmen met and offered a reward for information as to Jaquith Gurney's whereabouts.

Arthur Rice stopped often that week, and told me all the news about the case—or, rather, the lack of news; for though there was a fresh crop of rumors each day, when these were run to the ground, they proved to be idle talk.

"Miss Carter," Arthur explained to me, "tain't so much the loss of Jaquith that's bothering us. We could shoulder that all right, but it's the mystery of the thing that's got our nerves on edge. Jaquith warn't the kind of a feller to commit suicide. He warn't built that way. None of the Gurneys were. They were too hard-headed. But where in tarnation is he?"

That was what we were all asking; and, as Arthur said, the unanswered question was beginning to set the nerves of the town on edge. People wondered if he could be hiding somewhere, and had unoccupied buildings searched.

When I went down the street, after dusk, I had an uneasy feeling that Jaquith Gurney might pop out from some dark corner. Not that I would not have been glad to see him, too—if he were really the flesh and blood Jaquith.

But it was not only in the village that I felt the mystery of Jaquith. Whenever I went into one of the unused rooms in the Gurney house after sundown, I glanced quickly into all the corners. Knowing perfectly well that I was getting notional, I made it my business, one bright, sunny morning, to dust every room in that big house. There wasn't an unoccupied room or a remote closet that didn't receive my careful attention. After that, I had no more fear that the missing man might have taken it into his head to hide himself in the Gurney house.

But though I drove away that obsession by my brisk dusting, there was another kind of shadow in the house. It was always at the table when Dr. Thorn and Bronson Gurney were together.

Indeed, I think it was always present, even when Dr. Thorn was there alone. I attributed it to the fact that the uncomfortable suspense that held the whole village was intensified, in the doctor's case, because he had been the first to search the empty house. The fact that he had been the one to announce that Jaquith was missing seemed to have aroused his interest in the case. He had been very resourceful in suggestions for investigation—suggestions which had led nowhere, however.

Sylvia Brewster, too, was conscious of the shadow. Though she had occasional bursts of gayety, and though she was on the go with this one and with that one, yet once in a while I saw on her face the frightened look that I had noticed that first night, when she told me about her errand with the doctor.

Indeed, the only person who did not seem to be affected by the atmosphere of anxiety that hung over the village was Bronson Gurney. He said that the chief fault of a New England village was its eagerness to find material for tragedy or mystery. In the present case he declared that there was not the slightest cause for alarm; that his Cousin Jaquith knew perfectly well how to take care of himself; and that he would turn up some day as abruptly as he had disappeared, with an entirely natural explanation for his absence.

But the days went by, and Jaquith Gurney did not turn up.

XI

THEN it was that Joe Nelson came home from his week's fishing trip. He had gone off early on Monday morning—that same Monday when Mrs. Peabody had attempted to make a call on Jaquith.

Joe had always passed as a weak but inoffensive individual, and had never been considered of any importance whatsoever in the village; but suddenly he was thrown into the limelight of Fairport. I don't suppose he had ever dreamed that he would be so much listened to and consulted. Arthur Rice told me, later on, that being made so much of turned the poor fellow's head, and that Joe came near drinking himself to death from the excitement of his posi-

tion; but when he made his famous statement, he was perfectly sober.

It came about in this way. Just as soon as Joe had come into port in his little sailboat, he learned of the mysterious disappearance of Jaquith Gurney. At once he said to his informants:

"Well, old Gurney ain't been gone very long, anyhow. I saw him myself, the night before I started."

Joe Nelson gave this startling piece of testimony in the morning, but it did not reach the Gurney house until dinner time. Bronson, Sylvia, and I were having quite a merry time at the table, talking and laughing, when Dr. Thorn came in.

The moment I glanced at the doctor's face, I knew that something had happened. The cloud was different—black. From the minute he entered there seemed to be a damper on all our good spirits, and for a time nothing was said. I felt that Jaquith's shadow had fallen directly across the dinner table.

In order to remove it, I immediately spoke of the missing man. I had tried both ways—avoiding the subject and bringing it to the front—and I had found that we felt the shadow less if we followed the latter method, and plunged right into conversation. So now I hastened to ask the doctor, in as sprightly a voice as I could command, if there was any news of Jaquith.

He paused for a moment, and then replied in slow tones:

"Yes, there is some new evidence. Some one has been found who saw Jaquith Gurney later than Sunday morning."

"Who is it?" I asked, trying to make my voice sound quite careless, and vexed at myself that my heart should have taken to galloping at such a rapid rate.

In the same slow, quiet tones the doctor explained about Joe Nelson's saying that he had seen Jaquith put out in a boat on the Sunday night before the disappearance of the old man.

"Why, that's ridiculous!" I said. "I don't believe Jaquith Gurney ever had an oar in his hand in his life. He doesn't look as if he'd be any kind of a rower."

"He wasn't rowing," said the doctor; "nor was he alone."

"Who was with him?" asked Sylvia impatiently, resenting the repressed mystery that the doctor's manner conveyed.

"Joe's words, as they were quoted to me," said the doctor, measuring his syllables

as carefully as if he were dropping medicine, "were these—'Sunday night I saw Jaquith Gurney put out in a boat with that cousin of his that has just come back.' I suppose he means you by that," he added, looking squarely at Bronson, as if he were aiming a blow at him right between the eyes.

That was not the first time I had seen Dr. Thorn make a target of Bronson Gurney, and I quivered as if I myself had been struck; but Bronson did not quiver. He gave a little laugh as he said:

"Well, murder will out, as the saying is. The worthy Joe is probably quite right. Very likely he did see us. At any rate, Cousin Jaquith and I were out in a boat together for a few minutes that evening. I went over to call on him, but when he answered my knock, and saw who it was, he stood in the doorway without making any move to ask me in. Perhaps he was afraid I had come over to steal his old family Bible. I couldn't force an entrance, but I did want to have a friendly chat with him; so I asked him if he wouldn't come out and sit in the boat with me for a few minutes, and give me the opportunity of telling him some facts about the Gurney family, including myself. At first he said I couldn't tell him anything, because I didn't know anything except what I studied up. I appealed to his sense of justice, and then the old man said he'd give me just ten minutes, on one condition—that he needn't hear my voice again till my case came up next spring. I agreed to that. As he still made no move to ask me in, I repeated my invitation, and we went out to the boat and sat there, he in the stern, I in the bow, for about ten minutes. I don't believe, on second thoughts, we were there that long; for the obstinate old fellow wasn't willing to listen to reason, and in a very short time I left him on the shore, within a stone's throw of the house."

"And I suppose it is only just now that you have remembered all this?" said the doctor dryly.

Though Bronson flushed with vexation, he replied in perfect good temper.

"The only reason that I didn't mention it," he said, "was because I knew it was entirely superfluous, and wouldn't be of the slightest use in discovering Cousin Jaquith's whereabouts. I had seen how the woman who sold him a pint of milk was badgered and tormented by questions from

every one in town. They say she's beset by reporters, too; and I didn't propose to make myself a candidate for that kind of torture if I could help it. Not but what I'd have been glad to, if it would have helped one bit toward finding Cousin Jaquith; but I knew it wouldn't."

Sylvia was deep in thought.

"Do you remember," she said, "whether he left the door unlocked when he went out?"

"I remember he locked both doors and put the keys in his pocket," said Bronson. "Are you going to begin to do detective work, too, Sylvia?"

That was the first time I had ever heard him address her by her first name. I saw that Dr. Thorn noticed it, but Sylvia didn't seem to.

"I may," she said, in answer to Bronson's question, and that was all.

It wasn't any wonder that it made no impression on her, for we three had been together so much, and felt so much at home, that I might have called him "Bronson" without noticing it. Even if he had addressed me by my first name, I don't know that it would have surprised me much.

Upon Sylvia's admission that she might turn detective, Bronson went on:

"Well, don't try to do the way most of these detectives do, and make a mystery when there isn't any. My short call on Cousin Jaquith had no significance whatever. I spoke to Miss Carter about it, but I didn't think it was even worth mentioning to any one else."

Dr. Thorn looked inquiringly at me.

"Yes," I said, "you did."

I did not think it was worth while, either, to mention the fact that Bronson had told me about it before he made the call, and not after.

"Well," said Bronson, "I suppose there's no doubt that I'm in the limelight now, and that I shall have to give up everything else to get time for answering questions."

He was right. He had hardly finished speaking when there came a brisk, business-like blow from our knocker. When I went to the door, there was an old acquaintance, Inspector Bradbury, standing there. He was as brisk and alert as ever.

"I am Bradbury of the State force," he said. "I have been sent up here to look into the Gurney disappearance case. Is the claimant to the Gurney property at home?"

He threw me a keen glance as I showed him into the library.

"Isn't this Miss Eliza Carter of Bainbridge?" he asked.

I might have known that there was no evading those sharp eyes of his, and I admitted that he was right. Now that he had me safely ticketed, I thought to myself, he would very likely make a note to that effect in that thick notebook of his.

When he came out of the library, after a two-hour interview with Bronson, he was just putting his fountain pen into his pocket. Doubtless his notebook had received quite a large contribution in those two hours. Thinking that he had concluded his business with us, I could not help feeling a sense of relief; but just as I was ready to show him to the door, he quickly turned to me and said:

"Madam, I would like a few words with you."

My heart beat fast. Why did the inspector wish to talk with me about the disappearance of Jaquith Gurney? Did he think I had spirited the old gentleman away?

But he did not leave me long in doubt. He immediately began by asking me if Bronson Gurney had told me about his call on Jaquith.

When I had replied by telling the exact facts, as nearly as I could remember them, he went on asking me questions about Bronson. Did he smoke? Did he have many letters? Was he skillful with a boat? Could he swim? What clothes had he worn that Sunday night? The inspector went into so many details that I was quite ready to have him ask what color Bronson's various neckties were.

He left me with a perfectly empty mind. I doubted if there was enough in it to enable me to put my bread rising that night. I had told him everything I ever knew, it seemed to me.

"That will be all for the present, madam," he said, as he went away. "I may want to talk with you again."

Then Bronson came in to compare notes. He looked a little weary after his two-hour interview, and I didn't wonder; but he tried to make light of the situation, only indulging occasionally in rueful and exaggerated groans, which might have seemed comical if I hadn't been so worried.

"Well," he said, "I'm in for it, and no one is to blame but myself. It must have

been my bad angel that prompted me to try to call on that crusty old fellow. Why didn't you tell me better? Now that this New England desire for mystery has seized hold of me, it will play with me as a cat plays with a mouse. There's some one else at the door, Miss Carter."

Sure enough, that loud knock announced a reporter from the *Chesterfield Argus*, who asked the privilege of a few words with the claimant to the Gurney estate.

When Bronson had good-naturedly told him all that he could, and the reporter was going, Sylvia Brewster came in.

"Do go rowing with me," Bronson begged. "I've got to escape from this for just a little while."

I was glad that she humored him, but in the half hour that they were gone I had my hands full. However, I did my best about answering questions from the Fairport people, and politely turning away outsiders and reporters.

When Bronson and Sylvia came back, Dr. Thorn had come into the living room and was standing by the table, his eyes on some headlines in the newspaper. The two young people seemed to be in the best of spirits. Sylvia threw herself into an easy chair and said, looking at Bronson:

"Well, this is the first time I've been rowing with you since a week ago Sunday night."

I happened to be looking at Dr. Thorn just then, and I saw a curious expression come into his face. I was a little surprised myself, for a week ago Sunday night was the night about which all Fairport was talking. I did not know that Sylvia had been out rowing with Bronson that evening. It must have been after he came home from Jaquith's.

After dark, when I went out to bring in a tablecloth from the clothesline, I almost ran into a strange man, who calmly stood there in the yard, gazing at the house. I could not get him out of my mind that night; and after that I always had the feeling that vigilant eyes were upon us. I realized that none of our movements could escape the watchers. I came to wish that almost anything might happen to take away the eyes that constantly scrutinized us.

It was the third evening after Inspector Bradbury's visit that something did happen. How well I remember that night! It was bleak and cold, and the November wind was moaning around the house in a

way that I didn't like. In the afternoon Bronson and Sylvia had gathered a great pile of pine cones from the grove behind the house, and that evening the three of us sat beside the fire, throwing in the cones and listening to the wind. The doctor was up in his room.

I suppose the trying atmosphere of the house was getting on all our nerves. The rattling blinds outside, to say nothing of the creaking groans that seemed to be echoing about us everywhere, only increased our restlessness. At any rate, when there was another blow from the old knocker, we all jumped.

At the door I found Tom Wentworth and another young fellow, whose eyes strained up at me through the light from the hall.

"Is Dr. Thorn at home?" asked Tom, in a voice that hardly sounded natural, it was so fraught with import.

When I told him that he was, young Wentworth hesitated a minute and then said:

"A body was washed in upon the beach down by the ledges to-night. They want to have the doctor come right down and look at it."

XII

As I came downstairs, after giving Dr. Thorn Tom Wentworth's message, I made up my mind to one thing—that I would say nothing whatsoever about what I had just heard. I would shut that out from the house as long as I could. Nothing definite had been told me, anyhow. Wild horses should not draw out of me this hideous rumor—at least until it became more than rumor.

On my return to the living room, when Bronson asked who was at the door, I only said that there were some young men for the doctor. When Sylvia inquired who was sick, I replied that they did not say.

Just then I heard Dr. Thorn come down and shut the door behind him, and I breathed a quick sigh of relief, knowing that the awful thing was shut out for a while, at any rate. I would keep it out as long as I possibly could. We would have one more happy evening in that pleasant living room.

In my effort to drive away all thought of the ghastly secret down at the ledges, I must have appeared rather unnatural at my attempts at good cheer; but Bronson and Sylvia seemed to catch the mood that I

tried to create, and the evening was one of unusual gayety.

We had just brought a big saucepan of molasses to a crackling boil on the kitchen stove, and Bronson was distractedly shaking a popper full of exploding, rollicking pop corn over the coals, when there was another knock at the front door.

"Some one with more useless questions, probably," declared Sylvia. "Oh, just for this evening let's not let any one in! Let's not pay the slightest attention to them!"

"That's right," said Bronson. "Do let's have one evening of comfort!"

Perhaps I was a weak, foolish woman, and should have known better at my age; but after reflecting that very likely it was some one for Dr. Thorn, and that he was already out, I deliberately let that old knocker come pounding down again, and then again, without making a move of any kind. I had just realized that if it happened again, my unwilling feet would of necessity carry me to the door, when we heard steps going away. We all three looked at one another like naughty children. Then we broke into a laugh of relief.

For my part, I felt a little guilty, but I was willing to do so, for the sake of shutting out bad news for even a few hours. The next day I learned that it was only the principal of Fairport Academy, who had come to talk to Sylvia Brewster about a school reception.

We had a wonderful evening, and it was eleven o'clock when Bronson and Sylvia went off to their rooms. Then it was that I abandoned my first attempt at play-acting, and sat down to wait for the doctor. I could not go to bed till I had heard his report. However grim it might be, now that our candy and corn balls were made, and Sylvia and Bronson had gone off for a good night's sleep, I was ready for it.

I had a long wait, but I was neither impatient nor nervous. I did not care how shrill the wind was, or how the waves might pound; nor did I shrink longer from the shocking message that the sea had brought in. We had had our evening, and now I calmly sat and knitted while I waited for Dr. Thorn.

It was nearly one o'clock when he came home. I spoke to him, and as he stood in the doorway, I saw that he looked worn and tired.

"Whose body was it that was washed in?" I asked.

My voice sounded exactly as if I was inquiring what kind of dessert he would like to have.

He came in and sat down in the Morris chair by the fire. For a few minutes he did not answer. Then he very quietly and exactly described to me the finding of the body of a man, which, in spite of the rocks to which it had been roped, had been brought in at full tide by the storm.

Nature had thwarted the murderer, and had dragged his secret from the depths of the sea. Some of the rocks, apparently, had been washed off by the strength of the enormous waves, and the clothing had been completely torn away. The features were hardly recognizable; but the identity of the man, Dr. Thorn said, was revealed by his size, the color of his hair, the shape of his hands, and other distinguishable marks.

I was not surprised to hear that this was the solution of the mysterious disappearance of the courteous, formal old man of whom I had never thought unkindly. I had known, when Tom Wentworth asked for the doctor, that something of this sort was coming, and now I felt sure what the next step would be. During the past few days I had tried to blind myself to what I knew would come, but now the path before us was as plain as day. I did not shrink from it any longer.

Yet Dr. Thorn talked of nothing at all except the facts in regard to Jaquith Gurney's body. He explained that a wound had been found in the neck that could have been caused neither by rocks nor by waves, and that from the appearance of the body it must have been in the water ten days or more.

As he told me all this, I noticed that he looked very tired, and I did not question him further. For that matter, I had nothing more to ask.

As he still sat in the big chair, neither speaking nor making a move to go, I remembered a bottle of grape juice in the pantry, and I went out to get him some. When I came back, he was standing and gazing absently into the fire; but he drank it, and thanked me. Then, with a "Good night, Miss Carter," he was gone. As he left me, I realized that, in spite of certain faults of judgment, I couldn't help liking Dr. Thorn.

It was an hour later that a peremptory summons came, not from the knocker, but the doorbell! I had not expected an un-

disturbed night. When, after as little delay as possible, I reached the door, it was Inspector Bradbury whom I found.

"I am sorry to disturb you at so late an hour," he said; "but I must see the claimant to the Gurney estate at once. If you will direct me to his room, I will not take your time further."

I knew well enough that this remark did not mean that Mr. Bradbury regarded my time as valuable. He was merely trying to convey to me the idea that he wished me to do as he said, and then to leave him. However, I had no thought of paying any attention to that.

"Mr. Bradbury," I told him, "you are making a mistake. You are taking an innocent man."

Aside from a gruff clearing of the throat, he chose to make no response to this remark. Knowing that nothing could be gained by useless attempts to resist the law, I concluded to conduct him to Bronson Gurney's room.

While he was there, I carefully wrapped up a little package of our candy in a paper napkin. At the sound of steps on the stairs again, I stepped into the hall. I found Mr. Bradbury accompanied by Bronson, who looked as immaculate as if he were going out to make a call. His hair was carefully arranged and his necktie was quite straight. There was no sign of haste or confusion in his appearance or his manner.

When he saw me, he assumed a mock-heroic attitude and said ruefully:

"Behold me in the grip of the law, Miss Carter! You see, I'm in for it!"

He tried to take it so lightly himself that I certainly didn't want to make a tragedy of it.

"Don't have any fears!" I replied as cheerfully as I could. "We'll all stand by you!"

At that he put out his hand and gave mine a hearty grasp. Then he brightened up again.

"Tell Miss Brewster," he said, "that I'm awfully sorry not to keep that rowing engagement to-morrow—to-day, rather—but that I'm arrested, and so I suppose I must waive other engagements for a day or two. It will only be for a day or two, though."

When I handed him my little package, Inspector Bradbury insisted on looking at it first. Bronson watched the scrutiny with a droll expression.

"I don't believe Miss Carter has poisoned it," he said, and we all laughed a little.

Then, with a half comical smile of disgusted protest and a wave of the hand, Bronson Gurney was gone, and the heavy door closed behind him.

If I had been a crying woman, I could have sat down and cried my eyes out. Though I was prepared for this, I was hardly able to resist the feeling of desolation that crept over me.

But weeping is one of the things that I have never had time to indulge in. I must be in suitable trim to appear at the breakfast table. Indeed, breakfast was not many hours away now; but how empty the house seemed!

XIII

I DID not sleep a wink that night. By no possibility could I get Bronson Gurney out of my mind, nor could I keep myself from dwelling on the dreary night he must be spending. Later I should try to plan what I could *do*, but now my energies were absorbed in feeling the pity of it.

I had become very fond of Bronson Gurney; and was it any wonder? There was I, a lonely, middle-aged woman, with almost no one to waste a thought on either my comfort or my happiness; and for the past few weeks this man, still young and attractive, had done much to make my life a happy one. Never by a word or glance had he seemed to shut me out of his own good cheer. I had been allowed to share in the sunny atmosphere he had created about the house, just as naturally as if I had been young and attractive, like Sylvia Brewster.

Of course, Sylvia was friendly with me, too—perhaps as friendly as Bronson was; but with her it was different. I knew perfectly well that if Bronson had never come, we two women would have gone on living quite separate lives, never getting beyond the perfectly polite expressions of everyday life. Now I was fond of her, too; and it was all due to Bronson.

It might have seemed quite natural for these two young people to have interests and plans in common, and to regard me as one whose only business it was to keep the house going, and myself out of their way; but it had not been so. I was always included in the cheerful atmosphere that Bronson had created. Without seeming to

make the least effort, or to be conscious of any change, he had fashioned among the three of us a bond which, to me at least, was a strong one.

I had not so many friends that I could regard them lightly, and now I counted Bronson and Sylvia in that number. The loneliness that had been my share during my first days at the Gurney house had been driven away. Life at Fairport had been made worth living by the influence of Bronson Gurney, and I was eager for an opportunity to show my loyalty to him.

It was proved that I was not alone in my sentiments. Daylight brought out the town feeling. There was no doubt that Fairport was going to stand by Bronson Gurney.

In the early morning Judge Caxton, in spite of his sciatica, was at my door, peremptory and irate at the news that he had read. I answered all his questions as well as I could, rejoicing in his indignation at what he called an "outrageous blunder," and not minding at all his addressing me as "my good woman." I knew, after talking ten minutes with him, that he was a stanch friend, and would be a tower of strength to Bronson. A little later in the day I heard that he had been allowed to see our poor prisoner, and had already engaged counsel to defend him.

Mrs. Chester Peabody was as much agitated by the news as Judge Caxton. In fact, when she first heard it, in the morning, she was so shocked that she refused for a time to see any one or to talk about it in any way. In the afternoon she was driven to the Women's Club, over which she presided, and on this occasion I am sure that she did so with even an added dignity.

I was interested to hear, too, that she not only spoke of the case, but aroused so much interest in it that the ladies suggested sending a formal message of condolence to Bronson. It was decided, however, to wait until some more active way of showing their sympathy should offer itself.

There was no doubt that a great deal of feeling was aroused in Fairport. People in town spoke out emphatically, declaring their belief in the young man's innocence.

Arthur Rice, who stopped in to see me in the afternoon, pronounced the arrest an outrage. He criticized the State officers severely, saying that all they cared about was making an arrest and seizing some vic-

tim, it made little difference who it was. He seemed to feel that Fairport was at a great disadvantage over Bainbridge in not having him for town constable.

"Anything I do in this case will have to be done as an ordinary citizen, not as an officer," he said. "I ain't a mite of authority when I get over the town line."

I had had the line between the two towns pointed out to me, but I had never before realized its importance in determining the sphere of Arthur Rice's labors. He went on to tell me how frightened Joe Nelson was at the effect of his testimony. Now that Bronson was arrested, it seemed, Joe was ready to take back anything and everything that he had said, declaring that his eyesight wasn't very good, and that it might not have been Bronson or Jaquith, either, whom he thought he saw. But Arthur opined that since Bronson had corroborated Joe's testimony, admitting that he and his cousin had been out in a boat together, nothing that the weak-kneed Joe could say now would alter the situation.

Arthur told me, too, that all the men in town were standing up for Bronson in a body, and declaring in strong language that a mistake had been made. There was no doubt that Bronson Gurney had made a great many friends in the few weeks that he had been in Fairport.

If the sentiment that came in from outside was so pronounced, the atmosphere at home was even more heavily charged. It seemed as if there had been a funeral in the house, and there was no longer any attempt at gayety or good spirits. A little stray dog that had come to us, and which Sylvia had named Perditus, wandered disconsolately through the house, and pattered up and down the stairs, looking only for Bronson Gurney. As Mary Andrews waited on the table, one could not help noticing her long face and red eyes. Even Dr. Thorn seemed to be overcome by the melancholy atmosphere, and hardly spoke a word.

As for Sylvia Brewster, she was bitter in her criticisms of the stupidity of the officers of the law. Her resentment seemed to include Dr. Thorn, too, for she addressed hardly a syllable to him. This seemed to me a little unreasonable, for, after all, he had only performed his professional duty in determining the identity of the body which the tide had brought in. I never considered reason one of Sylvia's strongest

assets at any time; but she makes up for her lack of it by having certain other qualities which are more unusual, and which I hardly know how to name.

One of these became quite evident on the day after Bronson's arrest, when she told me of a strange dream that she had had the night before. She said she waked up and heard the clock in the hall strike one, and then went to sleep again and had this dream, so it was just about the time when Bronson was arrested. In her dream she said that she distinctly heard that same sound of the bird's beak against the window, and then she saw standing before her a little old man, whom she recognized as Jaquith Gurney. He stepped nearer, till he was close by her bed, and said to her very clearly:

"Where is my family Bible?"

He said it once and then again, and then a third time. Then he vanished.

It was especially strange that Sylvia should have had this dream, for she had never, to her knowledge, seen Jaquith Gurney in her life; yet as she described him there was no mistaking him. His looks, in her dream, were those of the real Jaquith. Perhaps she had formed an image of the old man from hearing us talk about him. Be that as it may, the dream made a decided impression on Sylvia. As she repeated it to me, I was impressed with a certain suggestion that it offered. It was the idea of once more locating the family Bible.

Judge Caxton—who, as a highly responsible person, had been intrusted with the newly made key for Jaquith's door, since the others had disappeared—would be the person to see about the matter. Sylvia agreed with me that it was a suggestion worth following out.

Late that afternoon we started for the judge's house, not knowing but that the outspoken old man would laugh at our suggestion and send us home for silly children; but we soon found out that there was no such danger. The judge, although he had never thought of looking for the family Bible, and had not heard a word about it since Jaquith's death, declared that it was a clew worth following up. Though he had been bustling about all day in Bronson's behalf, he would be only too glad to drive us to the Jaquith Gurney house himself—which he did.

On the way we passed Arthur Rice driving in the opposite direction. Arthur

looked so full of interest, and yet so mystified, as he bowed to us, that my facial dignity all but deserted me. I knew that he was strongly moved to stop and have matters explained to him; but the judge only bowed curtly and drove briskly on, so that we were soon in the house of Jaquith Gurney.

Then we began our search. We examined every room and closet and shelf. In fact, from the cellar to the garret of the old house, we examined every nook and cranny which our combined ingenuity could discover in the remotest recess. There was no family Bible to be found. The book which had been so highly valued by poor Jaquith was missing.

XIV

THAT evening, when I reached home, I found the Fairport constable waiting to see me. His errand was to summon me, in behalf of the State, to appear as a witness at the preliminary hearing in the courthouse on the following Wednesday.

When he had finished his business with me, he asked for Dr. Thorn, who fortunately—or unfortunately—was in. It looked as if we were both to be used as witnesses against Bronson. I should have liked to feel that Dr. Thorn hated to act in that capacity as much as I did.

So it came about that on Wednesday morning I found myself seated in Judge Stone's court, making one of the row of witnesses for the government. It was not a long row. On one side of me was Dr. Thorn, on the other the man who had thus far proved the star witness for the prosecution—Joe Nelson.

Joe was dressed in a brand-new suit of clothes, and was fidgeting about as if he wished he was at home. He couldn't have wished it any more than I did for myself; for though I felt confident of Bronson Gurney's innocence, I knew that not one word that I could say would help him. Indeed, it would probably be quite the reverse, or why had I been called as a witness by the prosecution?

As I saw Bronson led in, I concentrated my gaze on him. I wanted him to see at least one pair of friendly eyes; and he did. As his glance fell on me, a quick smile passed over his face, and then he assumed—for my benefit, I felt sure—a comic look of resigned dismay at the strange turn that his luck seemed to have taken. It some-

how made me smile a little, in spite of my anxiety.

But my glance was by no means the only friendly one cast on him. Although there were many strangers there, led by the curiosity which the newspapers had aroused, there were also a large number of Fairport people present, and almost without exception they sympathized with Bronson.

The district attorney, a businesslike man with a short neck and a head as round as a bullet, opened the case. In order to hold the prisoner for the grand jury, he said, it must be shown that Jaquith Gurney had not died a natural death, and a motive and an opportunity for the deed must also be made clear. He went on to say that he was able to present to the court conclusive evidence on these three points by calling on witnesses in chronological order. Arranged in this way, he said, these witnesses told the whole story of the crime which had been committed.

He began what he called his chronological sequence by first introducing the testimony that Jaquith Gurney had given at the preliminary hearing, held a few weeks earlier.

There was an objection from Bronson's lawyer—Mr. Speedwell, a great friend of Judge Caxton—at having the testimony introduced; but after a lengthy quibble Judge Stone ruled that the testimony should be admitted, as showing a possible motive for the crime.

As poor Jaquith's testimony was read, it certainly sounded antagonistic to the Gurney claimant. Somehow, by his manner of reading it, the district attorney made it seem even more unfriendly than it had when Jaquith gave it.

He had hardly finished when I was startled at hearing my own name called. It had not occurred to me that I should be the first witness.

As I rose from my chair, I caught a smile of encouragement from Bronson. I could not return it, for I felt far from confident, as I knew that I was likely to make a poor witness; but while I was taking the oath I forgot everything else. I felt that just now my own responsibility was the keeping of that oath.

After a few preliminary questions as to who I was, I was asked if the Gurney claimant, as they called him, had spoken to me at supper time on the evening of November 18 regarding the call he intended to make on Jaquith Gurney. I replied that he had.

Then I was asked if I could tell what was the color of the clothes he wore at supper that evening.

"Gray," I said, after thinking for a minute.

I was shown a gray coat, and asked if I could identify it. So that was what Mr. Bradbury had brought his suit case to the Gurney house for! To this question I replied that the coat resembled the one Bronson wore that Sunday evening.

Next I was asked if I had seen the claimant when he came in, and I said that I had not.

"Did you hear him come in?" asked the district attorney.

When I replied that I did not, that I had gone to bed, my questioner said:

"At what time do you retire for the night, madam?"

I told him that I varied, but I thought it must have been about half past nine that night.

"Then the claimant must have come in after that hour?" he inquired.

When I said "yes," he tried to get at the hour more definitely, endeavoring to make it as late as possible; but the wily district attorney did not persuade me to admit that it must necessarily have been after ten. I was a little relieved when he dropped the subject of the different hours at which I was in the habit of going to bed, and how long after that I went to sleep, for as no two nights are alike for me, I could give him no exact answers.

When I told him, however, that the next time I saw Bronson was on Monday morning, he brightened up and asked what the young man had said regarding his call. I told him that, when questioned, he had replied that Jaquith would not even let him into the house.

"Did he say anything about being out in a boat with Jaquith Gurney?" asked the district attorney.

"Not at that time," I said.

"Did he at any time?" he asked.

"He did," I replied.

When asked when it was, I replied, knowing that there was no choice for me, that when Dr. Thorn had told about Joseph Nelson's seeing the two out together, Bronson had said that it was true.

"Did the Gurney claimant then say that he had already told you about his visit to Jaquith Gurney?" he asked.

"I think so," I replied.

"Had he told you about being out in a boat with Jaquith Gurney before?"

"He told me—" I began.

"Answer my question, please, madam," interrupted the district attorney. "My question is, had the claimant told you about being out in a boat with Jaquith Gurney before?"

"I think not," I replied.

"You think not! Do you not know, madam?" he insisted.

"He had not told me that," I replied.

"Then he gave the impression that he had told you that he had been out in a boat with Jaquith Gurney when, as a matter of fact, he had not told you so?"

"I think so," I said.

"Don't you know?" my inquisitor asked sternly.

"I think so," I replied, and that was all I would say, so I was excused. I took my seat with my head in a whirl. I felt dazed as to what Bronson had said, and as to what I myself had said. And some people call me cool-headed!

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Bronson casting a reassuring smile my way; but I had no courage to return it. I knew that I had not helped his case.

Joe Nelson was the next witness called. I believe that he made an even worse witness than I did. I think I spoke clearly enough to be heard; but Joe mumbled so badly, and talked so fast, that it was impossible to distinguish one word that he said.

In vain did the district attorney tell him that he must speak more clearly. It seemed to be impossible for Joe to make himself audible. He would begin in a little, low mumble, and go on as if he were wound up, scarcely a word of what he said being intelligible. It was of no use for the irritated district attorney to threaten and bully. The louder he shouted at Joe, the more hopeless the witness became.

Finally, when the audience was on the point of becoming hysterical, and Joe was getting positively wild, Judge Stone, who seemed to be a man of good sense, interposed. He addressed the witness in so calm and reassuring a way that Joe suddenly proved equal to the occasion, and from that point he gave his testimony so that it could be heard.

Then we all listened to what we had known before—that he had seen Jaquith Gurney and Bronson getting into a boat

together. He seemed to have made up his mind to stick to the story now, for in telling it he made no reference whatsoever to his poor eyesight.

Mr. Speedwell did not try to shake this testimony as much as he might have. I think that he, with the rest of us, was too glad to have had anything at all extracted from poor Joe Nelson. As Joe took his seat, he wiped his forehead with his handkerchief; and as he sat down beside me, I noticed that his collar was all wilted with perspiration.

Then there were called several witnesses who lived in such localities that they might have seen Jaquith if he had gone home on Sunday evening after leaving Bronson. All these people said that they had not seen him on the night in question.

When Mr. Speedwell took his turn at questioning them, he did some clever work in showing, from their testimony, that it would have been quite possible for Jaquith Gurney to have gone home without their seeing him—that, in fact, the old man had many times passed their houses without attracting any attention, and also that there was another road which he might have taken, on which they could not have seen him.

During Mr. Speedwell's cross-examination of these witnesses, I noticed that Dr. Thorn looked at his watch frequently, and plainly appeared to be getting uneasy. I was not surprised when I heard his name called.

Briefly but carefully, with the aid of some medical terms, the doctor described the condition of the body of the murdered man, which he had examined on the night when it was washed in by the sea. When asked how long it had probably been in the water, he replied that in his judgment it had been there for about ten days. He gave his reasons for thinking it could not have been there a much longer or shorter time.

He was next asked to describe the wound in the neck, and to explain why it could not have been made by a rock. He said that in the latter case the wound would have been jagged, like the other cuts and bruises caused by the rocks. This one wound, which had doubtless caused the victim's death, was made by a smooth instrument like a knife.

The witness next carefully described his means of identification of the body.

"When did you last see Jaquith Gurney alive?" asked Mr. Speedwell.

"At the preliminary injunction hearing," replied Dr. Thorn, shutting his mouth hard.

"How many times do you suppose you have seen Jaquith Gurney in your life?" asked Mr. Speedwell.

Here Dr. Thorn made me think of Joe Nelson, for he mumbled out that he could not tell.

When asked if he had ever had any particular opportunity for noticing Jaquith, he said that he had. On one occasion he had overtaken the old man, who was on his way home, and had driven him from the ledges to his own door. How well I remembered that afternoon when the old man had left us with his Bible under his arm!

After describing certain things about Jaquith, which he noticed on that trip, he spoke of the old man's hands, which Jaquith held on his knees that afternoon.

"So you noticed his hands particularly?" inquired Mr. Speedwell.

"Yes," said Dr. Thorn.

"Are you in the habit of making a study of hands?"

When Dr. Thorn admitted that this was not his habit, Mr. Speedwell looked at him with the ghost of a smile on his face.

"Then why did you do so in this case?"

"I wanted to know them," replied Dr. Thorn.

"Then you were expecting that something would happen to him?" inquired Mr. Speedwell.

"Yes—no," said Dr. Thorn, before the district attorney had time to get in his objection to the question.

Then Dr. Thorn was dismissed. A few other witnesses were called to the stand, to give their reasons for the identification of the body; and this closed the testimony for the prosecution.

Judge Stone's announcement followed. The court would adjourn until ten o'clock the next morning, when the defense would present its case. I understood that Bronson Gurney was then to take the stand in his own behalf.

XV

THE next morning, at ten o'clock, I was again in the courthouse.

When the judge had taken his seat, he allowed the prosecution to call one more witness, who had only arrived in Fairport that morning. He proved to be a professor

from the Harvard Medical School, who said that after submitting a spot on the prisoner's coat to chemical analysis he had found it to be a drop of human blood. The district attorney now closed his case, and Mr. Speedwell rose to make his opening speech for the defense.

Bronson's lawyer began by saying that it was difficult to prove a negation—to show that a man did *not* do a deed. His client, an innocent man, was unfortunately involved in a series of events which, through a perfectly innocent action on his part, connected him with a crime of which he had no knowledge. Then, with no more preliminaries, Mr. Speedwell called the prisoner to the witness stand.

I had never seen Bronson Gurney so cool-headed and dignified as he now proved himself to be. Responding to his counsel's request that he should give an account of how he spent the Sunday evening of November 18, he said that he ate supper at home and then rowed to Jaquith Gurney's house in South Fairport. He explained that his cousin did not invite him into the house, and that he asked Jaquith to give him ten minutes in his boat; that the old man finally consented, on condition that he should not hear Bronson's voice again until the Gurney claim case came up.

He said that they sat in the boat, on the shore, for something less than the ten minutes stipulated, and that he left Jaquith there, as he rowed away, within a few rods of his house. After that, Bronson said, he rowed in the moonlight past the ledges and over to Eastern Point, then home, getting to the Gurney house at about half past nine o'clock.

"Why did you go to see Jaquith Gurney on this particular evening?" asked the district attorney.

"Because I wished to present to him some facts which I thought worthy of discussion," responded Bronson.

"Was Jaquith Gurney convinced of the truth of these facts?" questioned the district attorney, with the suggestion of a sneer on his face.

"He was not," replied Bronson firmly.

To questions regarding the time of his different moves, he said that it was almost half past seven when he reached Jaquith's house; that soon after leaving him he heard the clock strike eight; and that when he was on his way home from Eastern Point he heard it strike nine. He admitted that

just before the clock struck nine he had passed three boys in a boat.

Upon being questioned as to his knowledge of tying ropes with certain kinds of knots used by sailors, he claimed ignorance. Neither did he attempt to give any explanation of the drop of blood found on his coat sleeve.

Having told a straightforward story, with a greater air of seriousness than I had ever seen in Bronson Gurney before, he was allowed to leave the witness stand.

After him came three young fellows of sixteen or seventeen, who asserted that they had passed the defendant on the water about nine o'clock; that he was alone, and as far as they could see showed no trepidation of manner. These witnesses completed the testimony for the defense.

Mr. Speedwell now made a brief argument. There was no evidence, he said, to contradict the story that the prisoner had told. He had accounted for everything except one drop of blood, and that had no significance whatsoever. It might be accounted for in many ways—by a slight scratch or cut, or even a nose bleed.

The speaker dwelt on the fact that no one, either on the water or on the land, had heard a cry, declaring it to be an accepted truth that sound travels much farther on water than on land. When Jaquith was struck that deadly blow, he said, there was no doubt that he must have uttered a cry. If it were on the water, there was little doubt that some one would have heard it; but the prosecution was unable to find any human being who heard an outcry.

He then spoke of the temperament of the accused, and said that it was incredible that a man of his type should commit a cold-blooded murder and then take such careful precautions to conceal the crime. With this he closed his speech.

The district attorney replied for the commonwealth. The prisoner's motive for the crime, he said, in tones lightly touched with sarcasm, was plain to all. Jaquith Gurney was the one man who stood in the way of the claimant's desire for the Gurney property. The prisoner had had the opportunity for committing the crime, as he himself had admitted, and there was not the smallest evidence to show that any one else had had such an opportunity. Moreover, there was that accusing blood stain, for which the prisoner had not been able to account.

Since witnesses had sworn that they saw the prisoner alone in his boat at nine o'clock, the whole case, argued the district attorney, resolved itself into the question whether, between half past seven, the time the prisoner admitted he had been at Jaquith's house, and nine o'clock, he could have done all that the murderer had to do—kill the feeble old man, bind rocks to the body, and lower it into the sea. Any one who, during the case, had watched the prisoner's quick movements, and had noticed his alertness and resourcefulness as a witness, would have no doubt that he could have done what was accomplished. The commonwealth claimed that the prisoner had sufficient motive, opportunity, and time allowance.

With that, the district attorney closed the case for the State.

As Judge Stone arose, the court room was very still, and we waited almost breathlessly for his decision; but we were to be disappointed. Not until the following morning, he said, would he announce his decision as to whether the case should be held over for the superior court. Pending this decision, the prisoner was to be held in custody. He then declared the court dismissed for the day.

But Bronson Gurney's friends did not care to be dismissed. They pressed around him, once more assuring him of their belief in him and of their earnest hope for his acquittal. Many shook hands with him. Judge Caxton patted him on the shoulder, and Arthur Rice slapped him on the back with more energy than good taste, it seemed to me.

I was a little in the background, but he spied me out through the crowd, and reached out his arm to shake hands. As he was led away from the court room, some of the people waved their hands to him, and he turned back with a smile and a flush which made me realize that he appreciated the way in which his Fairport friends were standing by him.

Then I went home to relate the day's proceedings to Sylvia Brewster, who, on account of her school duties, had not been present.

When I left the court room I was oppressed with anxiety, and I felt in no hurry to tell Sylvia of the day's disclosures until I could do so cheerfully. On reaching home, I was not sorry to find that she was late. She did not come in until Dr. Thorn

and I had already begun eating. Then she took her seat quickly, saying:

"Isn't Mr. Gurney here? Hasn't he been acquitted?"

I told her that the judge had not yet given his decision.

"Well, tell me all about it," she said, impatiently waving aside the hot rolls, which Dr. Thorn was passing her. "Don't leave out a word."

So I told her, as exactly as I could, everything that had taken place in court that day.

Once or twice, during my recital, she seemed about to interrupt me; but she waited until I had given an account of everything, even the district attorney's plea, before she burst out with:

"I'd like to know, if you please, why I wasn't called as a witness. I might have told them something worth while. I didn't know they were going to talk about blood stains, but since they did, I'll tell you something. That miserable Sunday night, the 18th, I was in the living room, writing letters, when Mr. Gurney came home. He told me that he had been for a long row down to Eastern Point, and said that the effect of the moonlight on the willows, just where the river joins the sea, was so unusual that he wished I would row down there with him. I knew it would take only a few minutes to row to the willows, and I said I would go. I wish now that I hadn't, for it has given them just one more point to harp on and be suspicious about. As luck would have it, I stumbled in getting into the boat, and scraped my wrist on the oarlock. I noticed that a little blood had stained the top of my mocha glove. I wound my handkerchief around my wrist, and told Mr. Gurney that I hoped I hadn't spotted his coat when he helped me up. It seems I had, though. Why didn't he tell that?" she cried excitedly.

As Dr. Thorn didn't seem disposed to respond to this question, I said that it was probably because Bronson had not wished to bring her into the case.

"But," she went on, "that would have been important testimony. I ought to have been called as a witness. I shall demand a hearing now!"

Then Dr. Thorn broke his silence, telling her that it was too late, that the case had been closed.

"Too late!" she cried. "And this may be a matter of life and death! From the

way you speak, you seem to be glad of it. It isn't too late—I'll save Bronson Gurney yet!" She looked keenly at the doctor, and added, quick as a flash: "Where were you, Dr. Thorn, the night you're all bothering him about so—the night of the murder? That's something I've never heard yet!"

XVI

THERE are people who, when they do not want to answer a question directly, say something else instead. Dr. Thorn is not one of that kind. If he doesn't want to answer what is asked him, he makes no effort to say anything.

That was the case now. When Sylvia Brewster demanded his whereabouts on the night of November 18, he said nothing.

This time I made no attempt to fill in the pause, but went on eating my chicken salad—which might have been so much lead, so far as my deriving any taste from it was concerned. Consequently, after Sylvia's outburst, there was an uncomfortable silence, which no one made any effort to break.

The atmosphere proved too much for Sylvia.

"I can't endure being with such unsympathetic people!" she broke out.

Jumping up from the table, she snatched up her long, red cloak, just outside in the hall, and flew out through the front door, leaving Dr. Thorn and me still eating and saying nothing.

As I watched her go, I couldn't help thinking that Sylvia was unjust to me. She knew that I was not unsympathetic. She must have known that I was as much interested in Bronson Gurney's welfare as she was. It was only because her mother was a Virginian, and mine a New Englander, that she now made a dramatic exit while I sat, with breaking heart, eating chicken salad and hot rolls.

Dr. Thorn acted as if he had been born in New England, too. He passed his cup for chocolate without saying a word. In truth, I wondered if we should either of us ever speak again. I felt that it would be an unspeakable relief if we could begin to talk; but we only sat there, the room so quiet that the ticking of the clock in the hall came in clearly through the open door.

Finally, feeling that something in the back of my head would snap if the silence wasn't broken, and seeing no sign of help from my companion, I made a great effort.

"Dr. Thorn," I said, in just the tone, I suppose, that I would have used if I had been asking him to have another cup of chocolate, "what do you think the chances are for clearing Bronson Gurney?"

The spell was broken. Now I might be able to discover whether Dr. Thorn's silence was due to a New England temperament in a man from the Middle West, or to lack of heart.

"I do not know, Miss Carter," he replied, briefly but not unkindly.

"But what is your opinion?" I insisted, growing bolder every minute.

Dr. Thorn slowly folded his napkin, sat back in his chair, and then said calmly:

"It would be generally admitted in this strangely involved case that there are four possibilities, I suppose."

"What are they?" I asked, profoundly grateful at having drawn this really interesting statement out of him.

"Possibility number one," he said, "the accused man is Bronson Gurney, and he killed Jaquith Gurney. Possibility number two—he is Bronson Gurney, and he did not kill Jaquith Gurney. Possibility number three—he is not Bronson Gurney, and he did kill Jaquith. Possibility number four—he is not Bronson Gurney, and he did not kill Jaquith."

Although the doctor gave all this very smoothly, I felt a little dazed as he finished, somewhat as I used to when I studied geometry, at which I had never been brilliant. I asked him to repeat his four propositions, which he did with so much patience that it crossed my mind that he would have made a good teacher.

When I had carefully thought them out, I replied that of course, to some people, it might seem that there were these four possibilities.

"But to me," I said, "proposition number two is the only possible one."

"And to me," said Dr. Thorn quietly, "number three appears to be the only tenable proposition."

So I had his opinion, after all! I can't say that I felt any better for it. A gloom settled down on the dining room again. Was that hideous silence to settle down again, too?

Just then a flurry of damp, white flakes outside the window caught my notice, and I looked up to see the first snow of the season. There had been a good deal of wind

all the morning, and it came rattling against the window in short blasts.

"I wish Miss Brewster was in," I said. "I'm afraid there's going to be a hard storm."

Dr. Thorn rose.

"Where did she go?" he asked. "To the shore? I'll look her up. She needs an umbrella. This snow is as wet as rain."

He waited patiently till I found Sylvia's rubbers, raincoat, and umbrella. Then he went out to find her.

From the window I looked off at the sea and up at the sky, but there were no signs of clearing, and Dr. Thorn seemed to be lost in the damp, driving snow, as well as Sylvia. I grew more anxious every minute. If I had not had Mary Andrews to talk to, I don't know what I should have done.

So many gloomy things had been crowded into that day—Bronson's hard experience, Sylvia's flight, and Dr. Thorn's horrible opinion. I had reached a point where I would not let myself stop to think; so I talked briskly to Mary Andrews, only allowing myself the privilege of an occasional look from the window.

Finally I was rewarded. Through the cloud of snow I could dimly make out two figures coming up slowly from the shore. They came steadily on, Dr. Thorn holding the umbrella firmly over his companion, and at last they were in the house again.

As they stood before me, neither spoke, and I concluded that Sylvia had caught Dr. Thorn's trick of silence. I immediately began explaining to him about his latest telephone call. He cast one look at Sylvia and said:

"Miss Brewster, if you are going to sit up you must change your shoes."

Then he hurried upstairs for his medicine case, and once more left the house, his head bent to meet the wind.

After Sylvia had come down in her dry shoes, she sat up near the fire, drinking a cup of hot chocolate, and appearing too much spent and chastened to care to talk.

Finally she began in a low monotone:

"Mr. Speedwell said that when Jaquith Gurney was struck, there must have been a cry. 'No human being heard that cry,' he said. I heard that cry—but when and where? It is vague and far away. I can't quite remember." Then, after a moment's pause: "To-morrow morning I am going to see Judge Caxton!"

(To be continued in the February number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

Courtney McCabe

THE LAST DAYS OF A NAVAL HERO OF THE GREAT WAR

By Mildred Cram

HARPER shook the newspaper that he was reading.

"Funny!" he said aloud.

Old man Harris was nosing into a heavy red volume. He put it down and squinted inquiringly at Harper.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I was thinking of Courtney McCabe," Harper explained. "Something here reminded me of him—something funny. I almost believe I've got him nailed."

"McCabe? Wasn't he our posthumous hero—garlanded with laurel—sung, glorified, praised, and exalted? McCabe—of course! How have you nailed him?"

"Perhaps I haven't. It's a long story. Goes back to plebe days at Annapolis, shuttles across the seven seas, and ties here in a newspaper item."

Old man Harris put his heavy volume aside with alacrity.

"I've been reading about heroes all the evening—picking their mortal bones, with Wells. They're so human—silly and human. Tell me about McCabe; only don't tell me that he was pathological, a congenital coward, or a bad actor."

"I'll tell you what I know about him," Harper promised. "I may or may not convince you that this newspaper has printed his ultimate obituary."

Old man Harris smiled.

"Ultimate? I should call a memorial window at Annapolis more than ultimate. Every schoolchild in America can recite his last words—'I'll stay with the John Paul, sir!'"

Harper folded the newspaper in a neat square. His fingers were long and flat-tipped, and handled things deftly. His face, turned down and away from Harris, wore his habitual half smile, as if he were faintly amused by his perception of something ironical. He glanced up again.

"Did you know McCabe?"

"No better than most. He was with me on the Dakota in nineteen eight."

"What did you think of him?"

"Very traditional. He wasn't smart, but he knew what was expected of him." The old admiral hesitated. "He was always anxious to please. Dog Tray, they called him."

"That was my fault."

"How so?"

"We were plebes together—roommates the first year. McCabe came from a small town up State, and had the farmer boy's longing for the sea and ships—as you said yourself, traditional. You'll admit he was blessed with a name. Courtney McCabe should have been a swashbuckling Irishman, with a colleen on each arm; but he was the rawest plebe that ever squeezed into a midshipman's blouse—and, believe me, he squeezed! He had a waist like an early Victorian debutante and a chest like the Brooklyn Bridge. He used to hold his breath and breathe through his pores. If you spoke to him without polite warning, he seemed to gather his speech from the soles of his feet, and served it out word by word, all the time with beads on his brow and his hands growing red up to the wrist. It pained one to look at him."

"I was the other sort—languid and fed up, always tired and leaning against things. I believe McCabe admired me, and that gave me the excuse to be witty at his expense. Because he ran and fetched for me, I called him Dog Tray. He was Dog Tray to the whole class, but somehow his special allegiance was mine. It may have been because I came from a long line of naval forebears—born to the purple, you see, while McCabe's people had always tilled the soil. The navy was his god. Now that the world has turned to other deities, it is good, and

a little sad, to look back on the days when men prayed in their hearts to regiments and organizations. Traditions! The war has shattered so many, and we must get new ones.

"McCabe wasn't as popular as he deserved to be. He never got into trouble; he never contracted a debt; he never made a confidence. And since you are so meticulous, he never displayed even so much as a hair stripe of yellow. To me he was uninteresting because he was so confoundingly dependable. He made me sick and tired. Oh, my Lord, how he boned! His shoes shone like plate glass. His class record was ninety per cent. He slaved for inspection with his heart in his mouth and his hair standing on end.

"I confided my love affairs to him. I borrowed from him. Once we went up to Baltimore and had our wrists braceleted with tattooed snakes swallowing their own tails. Once, on leave, he chaperoned me through an uproarious drunk, unresponsive as a statue himself. He sobered me up and led me back, decent, to Bancroft Hall, and the manner of his delivery of me had about it the dignity of a ritual, a dedication.

"I lost track of him after his exultant graduation, when he presented me to a pleased, incoherent family verbally redolent of the soil. It included a sister, a red-headed father, and an aunt of sorts. I remember the sister because I danced with her, exchanging for her muslin ruffles and pink hair ribbons a Baltimore beauty who said later that McCabe was 'right holy for a navy man.'

"Holy? Well, perhaps. He couldn't dance!

"In nineteen eight, at San Francisco, he caught the prevalent fever and fell in love. The fleet went on to Japan bearing what seemed to McCabe to be the only passion ever conceived by man for woman."

The admiral interrupted.

"I never imagined—not really?"

"Why not? He was in possession of his ego at last, you see. He wore the uniform. His mirror reflected Mr. McCabe, ensign, U. S. N. Perhaps he reasoned that any ambitious female with half an eye would jump at his future, if not at him. At any rate, he fell in love with one of the prettiest girls in San Francisco—a slender little thing with a dash of Spanish, a dash of Irish, and more than a dash of the devil, who drifted like a smoke screen across the vision of the

youngsters. She collected epaulet rippings, buttons, photographs, dance cards, pennants, and souls. I saw her. She was somewhat ahead of her time—a potential flapper, with brains.

"McCabe kissed her in the moonlight. He had never kissed a woman before, save his sister and his aunt. His discovery of that initiated little charmer's lips, the moonlight, the yards of white tulle that got tangled around his arm, the odor of her hair, her laughter, sent him away dazzled and shaken.

"He wrote to her from Japan, China, Australia, the Mediterranean ports. He sent her photographs of McCabe in a jinrikisha, McCabe on the Great Wall of China, McCabe at Melbourne, McCabe on the Via Caracciolo. A kiss, to McCabe, was a promise. Had he had the habit of wardroom confidences, he might have learned that her sort of girl kisses, not men, but the fleet. He was having a postponed adolescence, the sort of hidden romancing that gives a Freudian a Roman holiday. Outwardly, I dare say, he was as efficient as ever."

"Quite," the old admiral admitted.

"When we got back to New York, he took leave and rushed to California—to find her married to a real estate agent at Pasadena. I happened to be on hand, or history might be minus a famous phrase:

"'I'll stay with the John Paul, sir!'

"Well, there he was, haggard, spent, desperate, with nothing to fall back on save that impersonal god of his. At such moments there is a deeper need. Perhaps that is why men are coming to perceive a new basis for allegiance and fraternity. I walked him up and down until he was no longer of a mind to kill himself. Then I trotted him along the Barbary Coast until he begged off, in healthy disgust, and called me names. This being a sign of sanity, I shipped him back to the Culgoa. He gave me her letters—a packet of violet envelopes addressed in a neat, round little grammar school hand, and begged me to give them to her 'without hurting her.' I did. She held them in her lap, turning them over with pretty, pointed fingers.

"'But I didn't love him, Mr. Harper,' she said. 'I kissed everybody.'

II

"McCABE went back to his first love, serving her with the zeal of a fanatic—

trustworthy, efficient, taciturn, neither particularly liked nor disliked. I lost personal track of him, because, as you know, I had other paths to follow.

"It wasn't until September, 1918, that I met him again. We came together as captain and executive on the destroyer John Paul, at Brest. McCabe was glad to see me, but there was an undercurrent of embarrassment, perhaps of chagrin—I couldn't be sure. He had changed. He had erased every vestige of the farmer and molded himself to the sea dog type. He affected a Beatty cap, and had had himself retailored in England. Well, I approved of that, although naturally I didn't say so. It was a sight to see Dog Tray come aboard at Brest—scowling, neat as a new pin, with one of those ice-blue stares from under the eyelids for every one. Gruff? A regular bowwow!

"I think it bothered him a lot to have one of his old mates there to watch him play-acting. He was a good officer—not brilliant, but steady, and it was work that called for balance. We went out of Brest in any sort of weather to convoy troopships—violent, breathless efforts, when the heart was pounded out of the John Paul. The transports ran for their lives; we followed as best we could. Every rendezvous was a high adventure. We got her, or she was got, or they got us! We couldn't stand or sit, eat or sleep, read or talk, while the John Paul was wallowing alongside a fast trooper in a big sea. Once across the danger line, we heaved a sigh, limped home for repairs, and asked for more—oh, begged for more!" The admiral touched Wells's bulky history with his forefinger.

"War!" he said. "The romantic game! What will they give us in its place—spiritual tiltings? War was wrong; it was futile. I see that—I am not too old to see that; but I liked it."

"All of us who escaped with our skins liked it, sir."

"And poor McCabe didn't escape!"

"I'm not sure."

"See here, Harper—are you trying to tell me that McCabe didn't go down with the John Paul? You were there. You reported his last words. You—you committed him to posterity. He's your hero. Why, damn it—"

"I tell you I'm not sure. We were not close friends, but I liked him better in those last days off the coast of France than ever

before. I saw his value, and sensed some of his very human difficulties. McCabe was unhappy, but he was making an excellent job of it. Only a confirmed and debauched psychologist would have guessed at his self-doubt, his enormous courage, his pride, and his sorrow. He had missed youth, he had missed dissipation, he had missed struggle, repentance, love, and failure. He was just what you called him—a good officer.

"I am going to say something you may easily misunderstand. McCabe wasn't popular; and, more than anything on earth, he wanted to be. I liked him because, in spite of his longing, he never compromised, never attempted to mix in, never spilled over. He did things and he got things done. Deep down in him, if you could have scraped off the surface trappings, he was the loneliest man I have ever known.

"The night we lost the John Paul I had talked with McCabe on the bridge. It was perfectly dark, not foggy, but black and impenetrable everywhere. Lights out, of course. We were expecting to pick up our convoy at dawn. McCabe spoke of the darkness.

"'Like a closet,' he said. 'Not a star. I prefer daylight. I don't enjoy pushing ahead against shadows. They rise up like a wall.'"

"'Nerves!' I suggested.

"'No,' he answered. 'I've always been afraid of the dark. When I was a kid, they locked me in a barn, and I spent the night with nothingness. There was a spot of moonlight on the floor, as big around as a silver dollar. It fell through a knot hole up under the eaves. As the moon moved, the little silver splash moved, too, and I followed it on my hands and knees. In the morning they found me with something in my hand. I wouldn't let it go—it was light, I told them. Light! My palm was empty, and they laughed at me.' His voice changed. 'I hate being laughed at!'"

"I remember the conversation, because afterward it seemed to explain certain things.

"I went below and to the stern, pausing to savor the peculiar beauty of the night. The John Paul was cutting through the water without a quiver, and a hum of wind seemed to pass over her and to stream astern like smoke. The sea was oily and thick, split open by that narrow steel shaft as ripe fruit is split by a sharp knife. Folds of water tipped with phosphorus streamed

alongside, neither changing in conformation nor breaking into curlers. On deck you couldn't see your hand before your face, and no one spoke. The sky shut down on us, devoid of light, as if stars and moon had been erased. Somewhere to the west our convoy was hurrying to meet us. Those days are over; yet I can recall, here in this clubroom, the peculiar quality of my excitement at that moment.

"You know what happened perhaps better than I do. First of all, I noticed a new note in the muffled sounds around us—the beat and thump of a ship's engines. McCabe must have heard, but the John Paul drove ahead, slicing the sea with her sharp prow. Some one materialized out of the darkness at my elbow, and mentioned this unfamiliar rhythm. We stood side by side for a second, matching our ears, both of us uncertain. There was no time to do anything. An enormous sound rose out of the silence—a great clatter, God knew where. A mass gathered itself above us, gray, towering, terrible, seemed to hang there for a moment, and then swept us away.

"I can't describe it. The shock threw me twenty feet and dropped me down like a bag of beans. I heard a crescendo of ripping noises, bangs, crashes, shrieks. Looking up, I saw the huge gray mass passing through the John Paul as a comet might pass through a steel wall. Then came a falling scale of chains and metal wreckage. The shape passed. There was a surprising moment of absolute calm, followed by a terrific explosion as the bulkheads collapsed. The bow and the bridge floated in one direction, the stern in another.

"The hum and thump of the fast troopship's engines hung in the air, grew faint, disappeared. With troops aboard, stopping was out of the question. We had to take care of ourselves. We did as best we could, confused by that muffling darkness and by curtains of escaping steam. Here and there an electric flash stabbed into the chaos, and you saw men running and hauling, upstanding heaps of twisted wreckage, gaping holes, an inconceivable mess; then darkness again.

"I had a broken leg and an uncomfortable conviction that I was stuffed with sawdust. Nothing worked except my voice. They got me off, and Wickham, who had managed things, followed. The stern of the John Paul was still afloat, but sagging, one steam jet after another quenched by

the rising water. The small boats scattered, and we paddled around in the dark looking for the forward section, the bridge, and McCabe. We found them. A fire broke out, showing us the mutilated prow, still afloat, with McCabe on the bridge. I saw him as clearly as I see you now—his cap aslant, his head back, his hands in his pockets, staring down at the glare which illuminated the hollow fragment of the John Paul.

"I shouted at him. He seemed to hear, for he made a gesture with both arms, as if to explain that he was alone.

"'We'll go and get him,' Wickham said.

"We went alongside and I shouted again. The story I told the reporters was straight. He looked over and called:

"'Keep clear! I'll stay with the John Paul!'

"His intention was excellent, traditional, though at the moment it struck me as ridiculous. A young man, his duty accomplished, facing death in the company of an inanimate hulk—for an idea!

"'The confounded fool!' Wickham said.

"The prow quivered, and McCabe lost his footing. I saw him grasp the rail to steady himself. It was not a moment to linger. We shoved clear, and, looking back, saw the wreck, afire, lift itself and slide backward out of sight, with a strange sigh as the water drowned the flames. In complete darkness again, we rowed over and looked for McCabe. We were still looking when dawn broke and showed us a gray, glassy sea strewn with wreckage. McCabe was not there, and none of the other boats had picked him up."

III

"WELL," Harris interrupted, "you had rather conclusive evidence, as I remember it—his cap, his last words, and the fact that he never reappeared. Yet it would be romantic to suppose—"

"I will only ask you to suppose. We did find his cap floating just above the John Paul's grave; but that was all."

Harper smiled.

"Decatur, Somers, Jones, Farragut—and now McCabe! I had no idea that America would go mad over him. In less than a month he was as famous as any man has a right to be. His picture was in every newspaper and magazine—Dog Tray, stiff and shy, looking out at you from a million printed pages. His family was dragged

from obscurity. His birthplace was placarded and plagued. There were popular songs about him, poems, biographies. I wonder what that girl out in Pasadena thought about it all!

"And, finally, there was the memorial window in the chapel at Annapolis. You were there? Wonderful show! The whole blessed class, very solemn, thinking how nasty they'd been to poor old McCabe twenty years ago. Some of us were fat, some lean, some bald. The devils had grown saintly, and the saints had been just a bit tempted. All were married, save only me. And there was the bishop, telling us about McCabe, pointing the way through flowery paths of eloquence to those immortal words!

"Confound it, I sound as if I begrudged McCabe the solemn music, his wonderful Irish name written high on purple glass! I envied him only the courage to die as he did.

"It should have ended there. I had seen him die, I had watched him enshrined, I had wept for him, and I was jealous of his good name."

Harper glanced down at the folded newspaper in his hand.

"A year ago," he said slowly, "I came face to face with him in France."

"You think you did!"

"I did."

"Then why—"

"You'll see presently. What good would it have done? To deprive a nation of something heroic, a tradition cherished, an example honored; to offer in its place a pathetic neurotic—what's the good, I ask?"

"I found him at a little place miscalled Les Sables, a fishing town built around a rocky cove. It was spring when I was there. The faint early green of growing things, and pale blue Canaletto skies, made it delightfully pastoral and mild. It must be a gusty, gray, wind-torn place at this time of year, for they told me that yellow scud blows through the streets of the town when there's a sea. For me, the shallow harbor was a milky blue pond upon which schooners and dories seemed pasted, as children paste pictures on a mirror. Their crews mended gigantic nets on shore, preparing for long voyages to the Banks. Women in white caps washed at a brook. The air was redolent with tar and pitch, the indescribable odor of a fishing fleet in port.

"I wasn't looking for McCabe. A bicycle tour from Bordeaux with Don Orlando led me to Les Sables by chance. Don Orlando sat him down among the nets to meditate upon a certain proverb, while I climbed a short hill to the village tobacco shop.

"The fellow behind the counter served me, and I was bending forward to get a light from the match he offered when my eyes fell on a bracelet tattooed just above his wrist—a green dragon swallowing its tail. I stared, and the hand holding the match began to tremble.

"'Hello, McCabe!' I said.

"He stared back at me.

"'Pardon?' he said, with an accent that was not that of a Frenchman.

"'I'm Harper. Very glad to see you, McCabe!'

"He turned away and fussed up and down the shelves, wheeling sharply to offer me a box of vile cigars, pretending that I had asked for them. I put my hands in my pockets and shook my head. He stood there, his shaking fingers clutching the box, his face white as a sheet. He had grown a beard, but there was no mistaking him. There aren't two Dog Trays!

"'Je ne comprend pas, monsieur,' he said.

"He was wearing an old service coat. The buttons had been cut off and replaced, and the stuff shone about the elbows and across the back; but there was no doubt about the cut of it.

"'Aren't you sort of a damned fool, hiding and letting the world crown you with laurels?' I suggested.

"'Je ne comprend pas,' he insisted.

"I was ashamed to tackle him in French. Throwing a franc on the counter, I went down the hill to Don Orlando.

"'I have seen a ghost,' I said.

"Don Orlando smiled. He is more than usually ecclesiastical in tweed knickerbockers, with his huge, bony feet in Italian army boots. Then the priest is concentrated in his eyes, and you are not distracted by a black soutane and a beaver hat with a cord.

"'To cast such well mended nets as these on the right side, Harper, might mean a great catch! *Ma*, you were saying—a ghost?'

"I told Don Orlando about McCabe.

"'Leave him alone,' he advised. 'He is better dead.'

"But I was curious, and I questioned the men at work on the nets. The proprietor of the *bureau de tabac*, they told me, was an English sailor, *un marin Anglais*, who had been picked up by one of the schooners out from Les Sables on its way to the Banks. No one remembered the exact date, but it was just before the armistice. They found this sailor floating on a wooden spar or hatchway, half frozen and unconscious. They carried him with them on their cruise, unable to question him, for he hadn't a word of French. Moreover, he was very sick. When they got back to Les Sables, a month later, the *Anglais* went to Bordeaux and returned with an armful of newspapers. I think I see the connection. The war was over. He professed himself very happy in the little place. People were kind to him. He had, after a fashion, prospered. He called himself Charles Courant.

"'Charlie Runaway!' I chortled. '*Bon*—I have him!'

IV

"But I hadn't.

"Leaving Don Orlando on the beach, I stopped again at the tobacconist's shop in the village. The sun was setting. The fleecy little Canaletto clouds were tinged with gold, and the fisher fleet rode at anchor in a polished harbor, pale blue, enchanting. At McCabe's doorstep a lilac bush was weighted with heavy blossoms. A cat crouched on the sill, her paws turned under a snowy breast, her yellow eyes fixed on the new greenness of all budding things.

"McCabe was inside, apparently standing just where I had left him. I have never seen a face so stricken and so humiliated.

"'Dog Tray,' I said, 'it's one thing to be a hero and another to be a live man.'

"'Je ne comprend pas,' he answered, in a voice as dry as dust.

"'How do you know I won't give you away? What if you didn't go down? You tried to—I'll swear to that. Better come back. We have some good ships. You should see the Maryland—electric driven.'

"I went on like that, talking shop, trying to touch him, trying to get at him. He stood there licking his lips, fingering his beard, shivering, like St. Anthony tempted by delicious visions.

"'Je ne comprend pas,' he said.

"Well, I had to leave him; but before I went I showed him the snake on my wrist, and matched it to his. I'll be hanged if he didn't fling back at me:

"'Je ne comprend pas.'

"Well," the admiral said after a moment, "you might be wrong."

"Yes, I might. That's why I've held my tongue. That's why, a month ago, I unveiled a memorial bronze in McCabe's native town, speaking my little piece with rage and wonderment in my heart.

"But here's a very funny thing—just a newspaper paragraph from Bordeaux, dated the day before yesterday. It says that on Thursday a Swedish steamer crashed on the rocks near Les Sables, that the lives of passengers and crew were in danger, that attempts were made to throw a line, that one Charles Courant, a shopkeeper of Les Sables, finally succeeded in swimming to the steamer, that he died of injuries received in the heavy surf, but that, thanks to his courage and perseverance, no one on board the steamer was lost."

"So," Harris suggested, "you have nailed Dog Tray!"

"Nailed him high and in a glorious light," Harper said. "The old boob! He was afraid of being laughed at, but you can't say that he was afraid of dying."

Harris drew the "Outline" across the table and opened the bulky volume.

"I'm glad you told me, Harper—very glad and very proud; but let's leave McCabe to history. Let's leave him to the John Paul."

"I will; but what you haven't seen—what bothers me—"

"I see quite well."

The admiral began to read, balancing his *pince-nez*, and Harper, lifting his long body out of the easy chair, went away muttering:

"Je ne comprend pas. I never shall!"

FULFILLMENT

THE while you came to me, questioning, you
Were glad to stay;

But when I answered—ah, yes, when you knew—
You went away.

Roselle Mercier Montgomery

The Misericord

HOW A WOMAN SETTLED THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE RIGHT
OF POSSESSION AND THE RIGHT OF LOVE

By William Merriam Rouse

MARGARET CRAGG stepped out upon the balcony that circled the living room, and smiled a greeting down upon Christopher Howland. He rose from the depths of a tapestried chair in front of the fire. In the soft glow of light her black hair was misty dusk and her eyes two stars. It was at this moment that Howland realized that she looked more beautiful to him than another man's wife should.

As she came down the spiral stairway, Lyman Cragg, her husband and Howland's host, entered from the library—tall, handsome, suave Lyman Cragg, antiquarian by avocation, and possessor of great inherited wealth. Mechanically Howland bowed to his hostess, and mechanically he took the hand of his host. The new idea had half stunned him, and he found himself replying to their greeting with sentences which, considering his intimate acquaintance with the Craggs, were banal.

"Why, Christopher!" exclaimed Margaret. "What's happened to you? You're as formal as an ambassador at a strange court!"

For the first time in his life Howland's soul was frightened. He did not dare to look into her eyes. He snapped his shoulders back.

Howland was an artist, but he looked more like an army man than a wielder of little brushes within doors. His exceedingly short hair and his capable jaw invariably brought a look of disappointment when new people learned who he was.

Just now Cragg helped him out of his rigidity with a laugh and a movement toward the fireplace that broke up the stiffness of the group.

"You've been working too hard," he said. "Isn't that it?"

"Quite likely. I worked as long as there was light."

"He's been in the fifteenth century," said Cragg, turning to his wife with a smile, "and he hasn't come out of it yet."

"Come back to New York now and play with us," pleaded Margaret. "Life is pleasanter, I think."

"It's much the same," murmured Howland, "with a different setting. The same loves and hates—the same struggles—"

"The same, certainly," agreed Cragg. "The moving forces are inevitably the same. That's why one is able to live with Tiglath-pileser in Assyria—with Lorenzo de' Medici in Florence—"

"Or with the Chevalier Bayard in France, where Christopher spends his days now!" cried Margaret Cragg.

Her eyes lighted with that swift enthusiasm for painting which had drawn her and Howland together at their first meeting. Cragg had a historical interest in the work of the artist. His wife saw the romance which Howland was trying to make live again upon canvas for a series of illustrations to be used in a *de luxe* edition of Bayard's life.

"What are you doing now?" she asked. "You know I'm following the chronicle with you."

"The duel with Don Alonzo de Sotomayor," replied Howland. "That's why I telephoned to ask if I might come to-night. I need a dagger, and I think Lyman has one of the right sort."

"Ah, yes, a duel!" Cragg became keen at the mention of something that touched his passion. "I think I have exactly what you want; but tell me about it. It's a long time since I read the joyous adventures of the Bayard."

"They fought on foot, with rapiers,"

said Howland. "Bayard delivered a blow that mortally wounded Sotomayor. The chronicle says that 'despite his good gorget, the rapier entered his throat four good fingerbreadths.' Then Sotomayor closed in and seized the Good Knight around the body. Bayard thrust his dagger into his enemy's nostrils and cried: 'Yield thee, Señor Alonzo, or thou diest!' It's a dagger that would be used under such circumstances that I want to see. Of course it must be the right thing."

"The misericord!" exclaimed Cragg. "A weapon with a thin and very sharp blade about fifteen inches long. It was named from its use, which was to end the suffering of a fallen enemy. It was for the thrust of mercy, the *coup de grâce*."

"Wasn't it rather a doubtful mercy?" asked Margaret. "It's hard to believe in death, and harder to believe that one human being can want to bring it to another."

"Death is a fact," said Cragg, with a shrug. "I can understand how a man may find it necessary for his own well-being to eliminate another for his own safety, let us say. But come, Howland! Those daggers—I have two of them, by the way—are in the library."

He walked quickly to the doorway and drew back the hangings for his wife to pass. Christopher Howland looked at him with a new interest. Howland liked this antithetical person, who was alternately club man and antiquarian, although he had never felt the closeness of friendship which might have developed with another man under similar circumstances. Perhaps it was because he had never been able to tell whether the possibility of real emotion lay under the well bred exterior of Lyman Cragg—an exterior so polished that at times it seemed to present a hard and unyielding surface.

In the library Cragg placed a chair for Margaret. She sat with a faint and delicate smile for Howland, her exquisite arms resting upon the dull mahogany of the big table that stood in the center of the room—a room which Christopher had first entered with a cry of delight.

Irregularly placed shelves held first editions, priceless and beautiful bindings, portfolios of etchings, Latin manuscripts illuminated hundreds of years before in the cloisters of the Middle Ages. A shirt of chain mail lay over the back of a chair, and did not seem to be out of place there. Steel of Toledo and Damascus—clay cylin-

ders with the cuneiform writing of Babylon—a great Bokhara rug that met the feet caressingly.

II

HOWLAND had become acquainted with the Craggs six months before, at a time when he needed to make a drawing of a piece of shoulder armor, the great *garde-bras*. Cragg possessed one of the finest pieces in the country, and a mutual friend at the Metropolitan Museum had given Howland a note of introduction. The painter found the antiquarian friendly, and willing even to let Howland take treasures away to his studio for intimate study. This had gone on all through the winter, and it was now spring.

A spring evening, with Lyman Cragg crossing his library to get a couple of fifteenth-century daggers, and Christopher Howland thinking that Margaret Cragg was as beautiful as a lyric read at twilight by a singing river, as fair as silver birches in the wind! He must stay away. He was unhappy and ashamed and confused.

Cragg returned, carrying two daggers. He put them down upon the table with the ring of true steel—blades keen of edge and sharp as to point. The hilts were rather heavy, of dull chased silver.

"The misericords," he said. "The one with the ring in the end of the hilt is attributed to Bayard; but I'm sure it could not have belonged to his period, because of the design."

Margaret Cragg picked up one of the daggers and Howland took the other. He turned it over, feeling the grip and its weight, and carelessly pressed the point against the sleeve of his dinner coat. It seemed to penetrate the fabric with a volition of its own, so keen was the steel.

A cry from Margaret snapped his head up. A little red line ran along her forearm, with red drops stealing from it. Howland sprang to his feet, trembling.

"You're hurt!" he cried. "Margaret—"

He checked himself, remembering; but for the span of a second she looked up into his face with eyes he had never seen before. It was as if he could see down into them, to unfathomable depths.

Cragg had turned from a cabinet at the other side of the room and was gazing at them. Suddenly Margaret went white, and leaned forward heavily against the edge of the table.

"Some brandy, Lyman!" said Howland sharply. "I think Mrs. Cragg's going to faint!"

"No!" She straightened up, and the color returned to her cheeks and lips. "How foolish of me! I'm not afraid of blood, and that little scratch is nothing. Lyman is afraid of germs, and he has everything disinfected."

She smiled, and wrapped her handkerchief around her arm. Cragg had crossed over to the table and was looking down at her thoughtfully.

"It's fortunate that I do take precautions," he said. "As it is, that scratch amounts to nothing; but I'm not sure that you are feeling quite yourself. Have you been in to see Dr. Langhorne lately?"

"Oh, yes!" She laughed. "I'm a thoroughly well person, Lyman; but I don't like your misericords. They're much too—effective!"

"They were intended to be," he replied dryly. He glanced at the clock, and turned to Howland with his invariably polite smile. "I shall have to keep that appointment that I mentioned when you telephoned, Christopher. I'm sorry; but it may mean that I'll get a piece of armor that you'll be interested in. Stay and amuse Margaret. Sketch the daggers, or take them with you, as you like. You'll excuse me, won't you?"

"Surely," exclaimed Howland. "And thanks again. You've saved me incalculable time this winter that I should have lost through red tape at the museum."

"It has been a pleasure, sir!"

III

CRAGG bowed to his wife and to Christopher Howland, and left the room. Howland sat down and stared at the daggers. The library clock ticked louder and louder, it seemed. For the moment he did not trust himself to look at Margaret Cragg.

Ought he to have said that he must go when Cragg did? He hadn't thought of it in time; and Margaret would think it strange if he left now, suddenly. He was a little dazed. He must stay away from the house of Lyman Cragg hereafter. He had no right in their lives. The hurt was too new and swift to give its greatest pain now, but he dreaded the long future.

Minutes passed. What would she think of his downcast silence? He must look at her, and speak. He lifted his gaze from the daggers.

Her eyes were upon him. He thought they were brimming with tears. Perhaps she guessed, and pitied him. He gripped the arms of his chair and felt the muscles of his forearms swell. He experienced a certain satisfaction in thinking that he had not allowed himself to take on flesh, as Cragg had. Curious, how the mind worked!

He made an effort of will, and rose to his feet.

"I—must go." He found words difficult. "I must—"

Margaret Cragg was on her feet before him. The handkerchief dropped from her arm. She drew breath quickly, deeply, so that her shoulders rose and fell. The room dimmed and swayed to the eyes of Howland. She did guess, and he might as well tell her. It would help him, and it could not harm her, since she knew.

Yet this woman was another man's wife. He walked around the table until it was between them.

"Margaret!" he whispered. "Forgive me, but I—I love you! I'm going away!"

Her arms reached toward him across the table.

"I love you, too," she said.

With all the strength of a great desire he wanted to go around that table and take her in his arms. That was why he had put the table between them. Nevertheless, his own arms lifted, his hands met hers, and they stood looking into each other's eyes over the barrier.

"I didn't know," he said; "not until to-night."

"Nor I, until to-night!" She smiled, and the tears that had gathered in her eyes moved slowly down her cheeks. "When I hurt myself, it was you I wanted!"

"Margaret!" said Howland, tightening his grip upon her cool fingers. "Does he love you?"

"That's my question, too, Chris—does he love me?"

"You don't know?"

"I've never known. He's so utterly—correct! I don't know whether there's a real feeling underneath the surface or not. I've never known whether I was a wife or a convenience."

"There lies the answer to our riddle, Margaret."

"Yes!"

"If we crushed him to take our happiness, then our happiness would fail us. It wouldn't be there."

"It's because you can think that way that I love you, Chris. You are like one of your own pictures, my dear, my dear—the one of my Cid, the Campeador, receiving knighthood!"

"Margaret!" he cried. "You shame me. I'm only trying to play the game as well as I can—and not doing it."

"Ah, but you are! Now! At this moment you are! For, Christopher, if you were to come around this table and take me in your arms, I'd go with you to the other end of the world. We'd be sorry, but I'd go!"

"No, it's you, Margaret. You could draw me there, around the table, if you wanted to. God knows I'm standing with your strength as well as my own!"

After that there was silence between them for a long time, while they looked at each other, suffering, happy beyond words, torn by the claws of despair.

"What can we do, Chris?" she asked, at length.

"We are going to find out whether he loves you," answered Howland grimly. "If he doesn't, you belong to me, and I shall have you. If he does—"

"If he does," she repeated, "I shall keep my oath. I must keep it. I put my hand in his and promised."

"I'll find out!"

"How, Christopher?"

"I don't know, yet. Somehow the truth must appear—perhaps to you."

Slowly she shook her head.

"This is real life," she said. "If it were only a story—"

"If it were a story, either he or I would be despicable, and would break his neck in the last chapter."

"But there's no villain, Chris, in this tragedy!"

"I'll find out, somehow." He released her hands and began to pace the floor with quick strides. "I can't come here as I have, obviously. I must come only as a painter to an antiquarian. Or should I stay away altogether? Tell me, Margaret, am I mad?"

"You're not mad, Christopher," she said, sinking down into her chair. "Neither of us willed what has happened, and neither of us can help it now. Love can't be wiped out by a gesture; but we can act naturally, and wait, and play the game."

"You," said Howland, stopping and gazing down upon her, "are perfect!"

"Go home, Chris," she said softly. "We both need to be alone—to-night!"

IV

HOWLAND took her hand, pulled himself away, and left the room. He found his hat and stick, and went down into the cool spring night with the feeling that he was a dream man in a world of dreams—a fanciful distortion of himself, which would vanish presently and leave again the solid reality of Christopher Howland, able-bodied and prosperous painter, with short hair and a reasonably sane and well ordered life.

But the dream was the reality, and the past was the sleep from which he had awakened. Before dawn grayed the big windows of his studio, he knew that he had crossed the border into a new land.

Howland had never before been seriously in love. He had never experienced the love which seeks first of all to express itself in giving, which seeks at the expense of everything the well-being of the beloved. He had, of course, thought that some time he would care greatly about a woman, but it had never occurred to him that the woman would be the wife of another man—and of a man whose bread and salt he had eaten, and from whose courtesy he had received repeated favors.

Nothing had warned him that his great and increasing liking for Margaret Cragg was the beginning of love. If he had been more given to light love affairs, he would have known, and perhaps he would not have cared. He realized this bitterly in the long hours of the night.

Yet no depth of rage against fate could make him resolve to take the wife of Lyman Cragg, even if she were willing to be taken, without counting the cost to Cragg. Yes, he had liked Cragg; and whether or not the man was a piece of highly polished wood, without emotions, he certainly was not a villain.

That morning Howland did not work. He sat through the hours looking out into Gramercy Park, freshening to green again. His thoughts went in fruitless circles, like the strangers who walked around the outside of the iron fence that inclosed the park. He lunched alone in a restaurant, instead of going to his club; and when he came in he found that Lyman Cragg had called him by telephone.

There was nothing strange in this, in itself. Not infrequently, since he had been

working on the Bayard illustrations, Cragg had called to tell him of the acquisition of a piece of armor or a weapon of the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Nevertheless, Howland felt a thrill of uneasiness as he called the Cragg apartment.

"Ah, Howland!" came in the even tones of the antiquarian. "I see you didn't take either of the daggers with you last night. Did you make a sketch?"

"Why, no," admitted Howland, after a moment of hesitation. "I decided I could work from memory. Thank you very much, as usual."

"Not at all. I telephoned to-day to tell you that last night I brought home a basinet which I think you'd like to see. I'm making a special study of head armor just now, and this piece is undoubtedly of the type that Bayard and Sotomayor wore in their duel. Often a light headpiece and a gorget were the only defensive arms in those affairs. This must be returned to the owner to-night, but I'd be glad to have you come up now and look at it, if you care to."

Howland waited a moment before replying. More than anything else he wanted to remain away from the Cragg apartment to-day, while he tried to bring order out of the chaos of his mind; and yet Cragg would undoubtedly think it strange if he did not seize the opportunity to sketch this helmet.

"It's very good of you," he said, at length. "I'll come up right away, if I may."

"I'll expect you, then," replied Cragg. "Good-by!"

Christopher Howland shook himself mentally and physically. He told himself that he must get back to his daily life—that it was imagination alone that had found something peculiar in the tone of Lyman Cragg's voice. Certainly Cragg had spoken with his usual courtesy.

Howland took a Fifth Avenue bus, and rode on top, to let the reality of the spring sunshine sink into his mind. He wanted to believe that it was a good world.

When he arrived at the apartment, he was shown directly into the library. Ordinarily Cragg met him in the living room. To-day the antiquarian stood at one end of the long library table. The basinet lay before him, the two daggers were where they had been left the night before.

Howland advanced smiling into the room, and Cragg came forward to meet him, but he did not offer to shake hands, as usual.

Instead, he bowed gravely and pulled together the big doors behind the hangings between the library and living room.

"Sit down, please," he said quietly. "There is something more than the basinet—something which I did not care to mention in telephoning."

Howland sat down by the table, and waited in silence while Cragg drew up another chair opposite. Anything might be coming—trivial or tragic. For the first time the painter noted the color of Cragg's eyes. They were steel blue, like the blades of the misericords.

"Howland," he said, leaning slightly forward, "I don't wish to be at all dramatic, but I've discovered that my wife is in love with you."

For the moment Christopher Howland was paralyzed. When his mind functioned again, its first coherent thought was for the protection of Margaret.

"Will you believe me when I say that you have no cause whatever for complaint against your wife?"

"Last night," said Cragg, "I saw you look at each other when she pricked her wrist, and I knew then that you were in love with each other, or thought you were. I had suspected for some time that you would fall in love with Mrs. Cragg, but I considered it none of my business. That she fancies herself in love with you is my business. However, I did not send for you to discuss my affairs. I sent for you to tell you that you must eliminate yourself."

"'Must' is a strong word, Cragg!"

"I used it advisedly, sir."

Howland was growing angry, but he realized that his wrath was nothing compared to the fury which kindled that blue light in the eyes of the other man. It was like the blue flame of a Bunsen burner—a heat to melt and fuse glass. This was the man whom he had called wooden in his thoughts!

"I am not sure, Cragg, that you have the right to command."

"*Jus possessionis!*" exclaimed the antiquarian, in a low and intense voice. "*Jus retentionis!*" Those two rights are so fundamental that they are as clearly recognized now as they were under the ancient Roman law. They follow from the *justum matrimonium*."

"The right to possess and to retain come from love," said Howland slowly. "If you love Margaret, you will keep her, without

hindrance from me. If you don't, you will lose her. That is the whole truth!"

"Howland," said Cragg, "for the last time I tell you that the right is mine, and I shall enforce it!"

"And I tell you that you are rapidly convincing me that you do not love your wife. I'll be quite frank. This morning, I feared you did; this afternoon I begin to hope that you don't."

Lyman Cragg stood up, and rested his knotted fists upon the table. He trembled with the effort by which he held himself to a semblance of self-control.

"Will you drop out?" he growled. "Or won't you?"

Howland rose and faced Cragg. He wanted to end the interview, but he had no intention of ending it by giving the promise that Cragg demanded. He hated the man now.

"Will you assure me that you are suffering from something more than smashed vanity?"

The sentence was like a spark in a powder magazine. Cragg vaulted over the table, and, as he did so, caught up one of the daggers with his free hand. The instant his feet touched the floor he drove the point at Howland's neck.

The attack was so swift, so unexpected, that the blade slit the shoulder of Howland's coat as he dodged. His hand reached for the other weapon instinctively, and he leaped away from the table armed. The face of Lyman Cragg told him that he would have to fight for his life.

V

Cragg caught himself and steadied. His lips were pressed to a thin line. He shifted his grip upon the misericord, held it as if it were a rapier, and advanced with the light step of a boxer.

Howland retreated and took a fencing position. The weapon was utterly strange to him. He faced a man twenty pounds heavier than himself, taller, and with a longer reach; but he was hard, he had good wind, and he was quite cool now. There was no longer any chance to escape. He must kill, be killed, or tire out his antagonist. It was this last that he wished to do.

Lyman Cragg feinted and thrust. The blow was high, at the throat. Howland parried it, but his antagonist's weight and strength carried the point to within a hand's breadth of his flesh before it turned aside.

The hilts of the daggers locked. Cragg recovered. In the heat of that tense moment Howland swept his arm forward as his weapon was disengaged, and brushed Cragg's side. He came back to position before Cragg could attack again. Then the big man began to move warily around him, breathing a little hard, but trying to save his strength and wind.

Both of them had been near death in that brief engagement, and Christopher Howland had learned that he might find himself the slayer of Lyman Cragg without intent. The thrust at Cragg's side had been instinctive, an automatic reaction to the point that had almost touched his throat. He did not want the battle to end in death; and so he began to dance in and out, thrusting, engaging Cragg's blade, disengaging, and retreating, in a great effort to tire the big man, to reduce him to helplessness.

Howland knew that he himself had plenty of endurance for such a contest. The breathing of Cragg had told him that after the first clash.

Cragg pressed him hard at intervals. He drove forward at unexpected moments in bull-like rushes, which bore Howland back and back until sometimes he fought swiftly and desperately, with his shoulders almost touching a wall, and with a question in his heart as to whether this were not the end. Each time, however, his own good condition told. When Cragg seemed on the point of breaking down his guard by sheer weight, the attacker's wind would fail, and he would be forced to draw off temporarily. Then Howland worried him as a dog worries a bear.

Neither went unscathed. Howland's left sleeve was slashed from wrist to elbow, and red drops trickled down over his hand. Once Cragg had pressed so hard that only a thrust at the face had kept him from bearing Howland back over a chair. The point had drawn a line across his cheek.

The smart of that wound spurred Cragg momentarily to greater effort, and then left him panting. Howland realized that he was preparing to risk everything in an attempt to finish it. He also knew that if Cragg failed in this final attempt, he would collapse.

Howland moved out into the center of the room. Then the attack came—a whirlwind of reckless jabs and thrusts that drove him steadily backward. Suddenly he felt the edge of the table pressing against his

hips. Cragg's point was sweeping toward him. He could not get away, and so he closed. He flung himself inside the blow, dropped his dagger, and caught Cragg's arm. They spun around, locked together, and fell over upon the table as they struggled for the weapon in Cragg's hand.

Howland heard a sound in the room, but the whole volume of his strength and will was concentrated upon bending backward the arm that held that long and gleaming blade. Slowly it yielded. He ground his elbow into Cragg's neck.

Then, before the gaze that Howland had fixed upon the dagger, the hands of Margaret Cragg reached down. They closed upon the fist of Lyman Cragg. Howland twisted with all the power that was in him. A long moment; then the grip relaxed, and Margaret took the silver-hilted dagger in her own hands.

Howland released Cragg, stumbled to one knee, snapped to his feet, and stood facing Margaret. Cragg pulled himself up and leaned upon the table heavily, panting.

VI

It seemed to Howland that Margaret Cragg was beautiful with a new and unearthly kind of beauty. There was a strange radiance in her face as she looked at them. She seemed detached, calm, aloof, glorified, wholly transcendent to the murderous battle she had interrupted. It was as if she were looking down upon them from the gold bar of heaven.

"You need not fight," she said, in a voice as gentle as flowing water. "It is settled for all of us."

"Settled?" Cragg got the word out with difficulty. He pulled at his collar. "What do you mean?"

"That you don't need this!" She tossed

the dagger away and laughed softly. A sob caught in the laugh and broke it. "The— the misericord of the gods—has settled it!"

"Are you mad?" barked Cragg.

"Margaret!" cried Howland. "What has happened?"

"Dr. Langhorne examined me a week ago, and to-day he has told me that I have tuberculosis of the lungs."

The silence lasted until it became unendurable. Through that seeming eternity the face of Margaret Cragg did not change, did not lose its faintly smiling bravery, its triumphant detachment from all things human. It was Cragg who ripped a word into the dead stillness that lay upon them like a pall.

"Tuberculosis!" he whispered hoarsely.

Margaret made a movement swift as light, and stood in front of him.

"Kiss me, Lyman!" she said.

She held her lips up to him. He recoiled as from naked steel, caught himself, and leaned forward to kiss her upon the forehead. In that instant she drifted out of his reach and turned to Howland.

"Kiss me, Christopher!" she breathed.

His arms leaped out and clasped her. He pressed his lips upon hers with a stifled cry of thanksgiving. The thirst of his spirit was quenched.

She put his arms away, but her hand remained in his as she turned to Lyman Cragg.

"You will divorce me, Lyman," she said. "I shall fight it out in the mountains. Good-by!"

"We will fight it out in the mountains!" corrected Howland, as he led her from the room.

In the doorway he turned and looked back. Cragg was still leaning upon the table, following them with his eyes.

"*Jus amoris!*" murmured Howland.

MOONRISE

THE moon there on the hills—no moon so young
Hath ever danced before the throne of night.
Oh, thrilling maid! Oh, crystal innocence!
Oh, virgin soul of light,
Making of sight a sanctuary! Whence,
From what deep wells of wonder, art thou sprung?
What mystic effluence
Floods thy frail crescent thus with brimming pearl,
Thou wild rose of the sky,
Thou silver-diademed girl!

Oliver C. Moore

Service

THE STORY OF A YOUNG MAN WHO LEARNED THAT HIS
WORK MEANT SOMETHING WORTH WHILE

By Anna Blake Mezquida

AS the door of his inner sanctum opened breezily, Atterling, vice president in charge of electric operations of the California Electric Company, squared back in his chair and sent a glance to his daughter that expressed a terse, challenging—

"Now!"

She flashed him an answering smile that held a touch of fond defiance, drew from her desk a stenographer's pad, and began jotting down unintelligible nothings, which gave her the appearance of being busy without at all interfering with her aural activities. Even when they held differences of opinion, there was a wordless understanding between the motherless girl and her father that was very beautiful. It had made her come here to work by his side, rather than spend her days in the aimless butterfly flittings of her friends.

To any one less blind than John Ritchie it would have been apparent that these two had held some conversation prior to his entrance. All the signboards indicated that said conversation had revolved about his own debonair, likable self. A *Sherlock Holmes* might even have deduced that it had been in nature of an argument.

But on those occasions when Ritchie entered the office at the summons of his chief, he saw but one thing—the sunny head and friendly gray eyes of Jean Atterling. He never thought very much about why he had been sent for.

Atterling was always quizzing his subordinates about this, that, or the other thing. He was a dynamically efficient man, who liked to keep a controlling hand upon all the small levers of that great machine which supplied light and power not only to the city of San Francisco, but to two-thirds of

the State of California. He gave to the company a passion of devotion second only to that which he bestowed upon his daughter.

It was characteristic of Atterling to come straight to the point.

"I understand we had a failure last night on the cable supplying the Municipal Railroad. Know about it, Ritchie?"

The corners of Ritchie's wide, pleasant mouth tilted humorously.

"I was on one of the Geary Street cars that got stalled."

It was a magnetic, infectious sort of grin, which had earned for him his nickname of "Pollyanna" among the boys. Over in the engineering office it was said that if the whole plant went to blazes, Ritchie would still find something to be glad about.

Just now he was thinking of the pompous little man who had sat beside him on the stalled street car, and who had vented his spleen at the delay in the most fluent and all-embracing objurgations that it had ever been Ritchie's lot to hear. It was really too good to keep. He had it on the tip of his tongue to tell Atterling, but there was something grimly deterring in his superior's expression.

"Is that all the information you have to give, Ritchie?"

Ritchie's grin faded into hurt surprise.

"Why," he wavered, "didn't Mr. Broxton send in a report, sir? You know he was on the job."

"Yes," Atterling replied, with that same grim note. "Broxton usually is on the job. I have his report. It's something quite different that I'm trying to get from you. While you sat there in the car, did you take out your watch? Did you count the minutes before the power came on? Make

any mental calculations as to the time it took to get the system back to schedule?"

He fired his questions like bullets from a machine gun, and Ritchie reeled under their impact. What on earth was the man driving at? All that matter of time must have been in Broxton's report.

"Why, it couldn't have been very long," he sidestepped tentatively. "Mr. Broxton was at Martin station when the phone message came, and he reached the car barn in eighteen minutes, he told me." Ritchie grinned again. "Broxton said that if there were any speed cops out, they didn't know what passed them, an automobile or a comet."

This time he caught the look that shot between Atterling and Jean, but without at all understanding it. He thought that the girl appeared rather flushed and unhappy, while her father had a sort of sardonic I've-eaten-the-canary contentment. Ritchie did not see where *he* came in.

"I suppose, as you sat there cooling your feet, you never let your mind wander to the contract that this company has with the Municipal Railroad?" Atterling challenged.

Ritchie reddened. He saw it now! The California Electric Company had an agreement with the Municipal Railroad, by which, after an "outage" of twenty minutes, the company was obliged to pay fifty cents per minute to the railroad for every car interrupted on the system. It was a pretty stiff contract, Ritchie had always thought. He said so now, for lack of anything else to say; and added lamely:

"I wonder why we couldn't make the same arrangement that we have with the United Railroads!"

"Humph!" Atterling snorted. "That's something else you never took pains to find out, simply because it didn't run tangent to your particular little circle of work." Then he swung abruptly to a different tack. "Ever occur to you, Ritchie, that Broxton might step up into Henley's place or mine, and that you might become engineer of operations in Broxton's place? Ever decide what you would do if Broxton should fall ill or be called away? Ever consider your capabilities for filling Broxton's shoes?"

Again Ritchie felt himself floundering, uncertain what his chief had in mind.

"I handled things when Mr. Broxton was on vacation," he said.

"Humph! No emergencies that time. Everything ran like clockwork, I remember.

The only time the machine did slip a cog, you put the trouble up to Henley."

"But—" Ritchie began defensively.

Atterling stopped him with a gesture.

"I know what you are going to say, Ritchie—that this particular matter was primarily Henley's business. So it was. Nevertheless, it would have saved time if you had tackled it, and you ducked."

The blood mounted to Ritchie's temples—the more hotly because he had caught Jean Atterling's grave eyes upon him. With his sense of hurt there was also a feeling of his chief's injustice.

"If I have ever failed you, Mr. Atterling, or if you think I don't know my business as electrical engineer—"

"You do know *your* business, Ritchie," Atterling cut in with curious emphasis. "That's why I'm wasting time on this talk—that, and because your father was my friend. You're a good man, a valuable man, as far as you go; but—" He broke off for another rapid-fire series of questioning. "Ever feel the romance of the work you're in? Ever think of electricity as the great modern civilizer? Ever picture to yourself the waste marshes this company has reclaimed? The agricultural lands it has developed? The industrial wheels it has set rolling? Ever reckoned up the men it has given employment to? The farmers' lives it has made easy? The little homes it has kept lighted?" He paused significantly. "Have you ever thought of all that lies back of the company's motto of 'service'?"

Ritchie smiled. He felt more comfortable now, surer of himself. If there was one thing that the officials of the company had drilled into their employees, it was this—no matter what went wrong at the company's end of the line, the consumer must have "continuous service." If there should be a failure of the great transmission lines bringing power to San Francisco from the hydroelectric stations in the Sierras, the two steam-generating plants at the Potrero and North Beach could be speeded up to carry the necessary load. In the rare event of the steam plants failing, there were the ever-charged storage batteries at the substations to tide the city over.

This, Ritchie supposed, was what Atterling meant. It was as deep as the other's words had gone.

"I guess every C. E. C. man knows what 'service' means," he said complacently. "Only I sometimes wonder if it wouldn't

be a good thing to let folks go without their lights for a spell. Let 'em use kerosene or candles for a night, as their grandparents did. Teach 'em to appreciate the company. Sunshine after rain, you know!"

There was no responsive smile on Atterling's lips, though for an instant further speech seemed to hover there. Then he waved a hand of dismissal and turned back to his desk.

Ritchie went out. The abrupt close of the interview had brought back his bewilderment. Was this all that Atterling had summoned him for—to ask if he knew what "service" meant? And what had caused that sudden reserve in Jean Atterling's friendliness?

He hung outside the office, wondering what he should have said differently, and whether he ought to go back and say more.

Atterling's muffled voice from within came in unexpected answer.

"Well, was I right? Are you convinced? Would you trust your business to a man who shows neither imagination nor a sense of responsibility? Would you intrust him with your future, little girl? I loved his father, Jean; but—"

II

RITCHIE shot away from the door as if he had received a shock of alternating current. A sickening misery numbed him. It held him in its paralyzing grip as he went back from the main building, where the head offices were, to the squat concrete structure that housed the engineering force. His gloom shrouded him so heavily as he strode to his desk that his pal, Stevens, looked up from his drafting board and jauntily inquired:

"S'matter, Polly? Wouldn't the old man play the glad game?"

Ritchie glowered witheringly. Then, slowly, a smile broke through. A thought had occurred to him—a happy, delicious thought. It was all he could do to keep from whistling as he swung himself into his chair.

He had received a sudden revelation as to the real meaning of those apparently mercileless remarks of his chief. He, John Ritchie, had been under discussion by Atterling and Jean, not as an employee of the California Electric Company, but as a prospective husband for Miss Atterling. They had seen his love for Jean, and had recognized it as worthy to compete with

all that her richer suitors had to offer. Atterling might not be overenthusiastic for him as a son-in-law, but Jean had battled in his defense, else why Atterling's "Are you convinced?"

If Jean was willing to fight for him, she loved him. And if she loved him—his mathematical mind leaped joyously to its unerring conclusion.

With his usual optimism, Ritchie even began to see another slant to his interview with Atterling. Instead of intimating that he was not capable of filling Broxton's shoes, Atterling had merely intended giving him a friendly spur to ambition; had indeed hinted that some day—

Ritchie's dreams were lost in a roseate cloud, from which he descended reluctantly to the prosaic blue prints on his desk.

He was in his gayest mood as he left the office at five o'clock. He was dining that evening with the Atterlings—a frequent custom on Saturdays, started before his father's death. Usually it was Atterling who gave the invitation, or perhaps Atterling's widowed sister Molly, who kept house. This time it had been Jean. In the light of Ritchie's recent thrilling discovery, the fact held new significance.

As he jumped from the street car at his transfer point, just beyond the company's main offices, he glanced at the automobiles lined before the door. It sometimes happened that Jean was waiting in her father's machine, and would beckon him to a seat beside her. There had been two occasions when her father was detained on business, and the young people had chummily taken the street car together. Atterling still lived in the huge old-fashioned house where Jean was born and his wife had died, only a block from the shabbily genteel boarding house where Ritchie had his room—two stanch, comfortable, homely homes, which the city had passed in its uptown stride.

To-night, however, the big blue car was empty. Then Ritchie saw, with quick, glad surprise, that Jean was waiting on the corner for the street car.

In the act of springing forward, he stopped, his gaze drawn by a little scene across the street. Old Pete, the blind news vender from whom Ritchie bought his afternoon paper, was tapping the sidewalk with his cane, lifting a beseeching face to the heedlessly hurrying crowds, evidently hesitating as whether to dare the crossing alone, or to wait for a helping hand.

Ritchie cast one longing glance at Jean and the approaching street car that she was preparing to board, and then, heedless of his own safety, dashed across the street to Pete. As he piloted the old man to the curb, he said cheerily:

"Better not try it alone! A fellow needs four legs and two pairs of eyes to save his neck at this hour."

A light hand touched his arm.

"I saw you and waited," came the voice that he loved. "Shall we walk? Father is in conference with President Mead, and will be late home, anyhow."

As they climbed the Powell Street hill, Jean said softly:

"It was dear of you, John Ritchie, to look out for the blind man!"

There was a flaming tenderness in her eyes that dizzied him; and immediately he blurted out what he had not intended to say until evening.

"I love you, Jean! I'd give my life to make you happy."

Then, like many another man, he made the mistake of adding to his one perfect argument.

"I haven't much to offer you, dear; but there's no reason why I shouldn't be where your father is some day. I've enough, as it is, to keep you comfortable. You wouldn't have to work—" He broke off, realizing suddenly that it was not from any necessity that she was working now. "I mean, if you had other interests, a home of your own, and—and—" He was blundering badly, but he did not know just how to extricate himself. "You—do care a little, Jean?" he finished lamely.

He was instantly aware that she had drawn from him. Her face held the same grave reserve that had troubled him that morning. She appeared to be struggling to know how to say what she had to say. When the words did come, they were scarcely above a whisper.

"It was because I was learning to care that father spoke to you as he did this morning. He wanted to show me—"

"Jean, you darling! You do love me!"

It took all his will power not to crush her in his arms there in the crowded street; but her strange, cool remoteness again dashed his ardor.

"You don't understand. I don't know that I can make you understand—John!" She lingered on his name wistfully, as if that would soften what was to follow. "You'll

have to see it from father's side first. You know how he started in as a boy, when it was the old San Francisco Gas and Electric Company. He began at the bottom, and studied nights to win his engineering degree. You know how he has thrown his whole soul into his work ever since; how to-day—"

"I know that your father's heart is bound up in his work, if that's what you mean," he caught her up, with a trace of puzzled bewilderment. "And I know there's a soft spot in your own heart for the company, or you wouldn't be working there. As for that, I'm rather partial to the good old C. E. C. myself—particularly on pay day," he finished with a grin.

A touch of hardness straightened the soft curve of the girl's lips. She was never more Atterling's daughter than now.

"That's it!" she flared. "You've said it yourself—pay day! That's all that the company means to you, all that your work means. You're loyal to the C. E. C. because it puts dollars in your pocket. The company meant something more to your father, and means something more to mine. They watched it grow. When the old placer mining claims petered out, they utilized the water rights to establish the first commercial hydroelectric power plant in the world. They saw John Martin and Eugene de Sabla bring the first sixty-thousand-volt transmission line down from the mountains. They had a hand in the development of agriculture, in the growth of cities, in the building of great industries. It was not merely a question of dividends with them. It was a matter of serving." She stopped, then added passionately: "Your father and mine were dreamers, and so am I!"

Ritchie's face held a sort of pathetic blankness.

"I suppose I get your drift," he said; "but I don't just connect it up with us, Jean."

"There is a connection," she answered slowly. "Only I—I wouldn't admit it until this morning." Her cheeks burned suddenly hot. "You take everything so lightly. It means something when the boys nickname you Pollyanna, John. I believe in cheerfulness; but *nothing* troubles you. Nothing goes deep. You put all the anxiety up to the other man. Life—marriage—they are like the business world. There are sure to be some hard days, bad days, John—days when it means putting your shoulder

to the wheel and worrying a little." She hesitated, then wound up bravely: "John, when the big crises of life come, I want the man I marry to be *there!*"

"And you think I won't!" he challenged bitterly. "That's what your father meant about filling Broxton's shoes. I thought it was something different. That's why he flung it in my face about Henley. He thinks, *you think*, that when some big emergency arises, I shall simply fall down!"

"No"—her voice shook a little—"we think you will dodge it with a laugh."

His lips had tightened and his face had grown a little gray. He walked on so fast that Jean was out of breath to keep up. She slipped a hand through his arm.

"Won't you show father, John Ritchie?" she said wistfully. "Won't you show *me?*"

III

WOMANLIKE, Jean made up for having hurt him by being her most adorable self that evening. Atterling, too, was in jovial mood, and Ritchie had always been the spoiled favorite of Jean's Aunt Molly. In this genial atmosphere, it was not strange that Ritchie's spirits rose again. Before he said good night, he had managed to lay hold once more upon that comforting conviction which had so buoyed him through the day—the conviction that whatever disagreeable things had been uttered were merely by way of prodding his ambition, spurring him on to bigger things before he claimed Jean's love.

He was actually whistling as he ran down the steps, so that the shrill cheeriness of it reached Broxton as he stopped his automobile at the corner to let a street car go by. The engineer turned his head.

"Hello, Ritchie! Thought I recognized the whistle."

Ritchie saw that Broxton was in a company car.

"Trouble somewhere?" he asked with casual unconcern.

"Five separate grounds on the line supplying the Sutter School," Broxton growled. "Every last one of the evening classes had to be dismissed."

Broxton looked so solemn that Ritchie couldn't help laughing.

"Well, you should worry! Give the grown-up kids a chance to play hooky!"

Broxton's countenance showed a suggestion of Atterling's grimness.

"I rather fancy that men and women

who are willing to go to night school for an education are hardly the hooky-playing kind. Some day, something is going to hit *you*, Ritchie," he prophesied, "and you'll wake up to the fact that life isn't all one darned joke!"

Broxton, too! Ritchie went home with his good humor slightly ruffled. Why did they all want to pick on him? You'd think it was a conspiracy. Just because he didn't pull a long face every time that things went wrong, folks thought he couldn't come up to the scratch in a crisis. Well—his lips set quite as firmly as either Broxton's or Atterling's—he'd show them! By gad, he would!

He yearned so fervently for a chance to "show them" that he had an actually guilty feeling when Broxton came down with appendicitis early in March.

Almost immediately, however, the rose-colored view presented itself. He did not want Broxton to be sick, of course; but if Broxton *had* to be sick—well, it was thoughtful of fate to bring it about at a time when Henley, the chief engineer, was away, viewing the new Pitt River developments. That left Ritchie in full charge of operations for San Francisco. Let something happen to one of the cables or turbines now! Atterling would see some action, by George!

But the turbines and cables and high tension wires seemed docilely bewitched. As during Broxton's vacation the previous year, the thousand little cogs of the great machine that supplied light to the city turned as if greased. There were only a few minor disturbances that a schoolboy could handle. As Ritchie's pal, Stevens, facetiously remarked, with more truth than wisdom:

"We certainly have one grand easy time when Polly is in charge!"

Only the pessimistically inclined would have hailed it as the lull before the storm.

IV

THE storm that broke was real and not figurative. For three years California had suffered the scourge of dry winters and dry springs, and now, in the last days of March, the equinoctial storm swept down upon the State with pent-up wrath. The accumulated rains launched their torrents into the thirsty earth, turned the muddy Sacramento into a swollen, raging terror, lashed the shipping and drove it into the harbors in

the teeth of a hundred-mile gale. Old-timers shook their heads, and the newspapers boastfully proclaimed it the worst storm in thirty years.

That was on Friday night and Saturday. Thursday, as it happened, had been a day of deceptive beauty, with blue skies, radiant sun, and air of a clearness that brought out in cameo relief the shore line and the undulations of the hills. The only threat lay in the sharp, gusty north wind.

Atterling, driving his big blue car, had left that morning to inspect the power house up Auburn way. Because of the loveliness of the day, he had taken Jean. He was planning not to return to the city until Sunday night, making it a week-end vacation for them both. The rain did not begin falling until the early morning hours of Friday, and it was Friday afternoon before the storm lashed itself into fury.

Immediately things began to happen. A wire went down here, a feeder was short-circuited there, a transformer bank went out of commission. When Ritchie was not glued to his telephone, giving orders, his car was eating up the blocks carrying him from station to station. He was "showing them" with a vengeance, he thought, and he was quite happy about it. Every new report of trouble stirred him to an expansive cheerfulness.

He would have been completely happy had it not been for a lurking anxiety about Jean and her father. If Atterling had seen in time that the storm was coming, he would probably have turned back. Ritchie telephoned to the vice president's house on Friday evening, and had learned from Aunt Molly that her brother and niece had not returned. He called up again on Saturday morning, but after that he was too busy.

He assured himself that they would certainly not think of starting home until the tempest had spent itself. Atterling wouldn't be crazy enough to risk his life and Jean's just for fear that Ritchie couldn't handle the company's troubles alone. Nevertheless, in Ritchie's heart there was the uneasy misgiving that this was just the kind of fool thing that Atterling might do, and that Jean might applaud him for doing. He wished that they had demonstrated a little more confidence in their present engineer of operations.

The first disaster of importance was the grounding of the submarine cables through the Golden Gate—the two cables that

brought power to the city from the hydroelectric stations in the Sierras. It was easy to see how the heavy tide had washed the cable back and forth over the jagged rocks until their sharp edges had cut through the steel armor and lead into the insulation, and caused a short circuit. The worst of it was that when the first cable blew up, it took the other cable with it; and with such a surf, it was hopeless to send out barges for repair work.

Ritchie's spirits bounded. He would keep up service to the city through the steam-generating plants at the Potrero and North Beach, and by the hydroelectric power coming up the peninsula through Martin station. It was another chance to "show them."

On Saturday, a little before noon, the oil switches tripped out at the Potrero steam plant, automatically separating the plant from Martin station. This meant that Martin station was dead, and that the last of the current reaching the city from the hydroelectric stations had failed.

Ritchie had hard work getting in communication with Martin station. The telephone company, it seems, was having troubles of its own. At last word reached him, by way of Oakland, that the hydroelectric "juice" had failed because the high transmission tower at Auburn had blown down.

Auburn! Then Atterling would know, and would understand the difficulties that Ritchie was facing in the city. It was a strangely comforting thought to Ritchie—a thought which President Mead and the officials of the company might have found hard to comprehend.

He clung to his telephone through the early afternoon, giving orders here, orders there. His nerves were keyed to highest tension, like a man going into battle. The roar of the wind without, the whipping of great sheets of water across the window panes, were as some strange intoxication.

At four o'clock he got word that the steam-generating plant at North Beach was dying down. He clambered into his car and drove out there in the teeth of a gale that threatened to sweep him off the cliff.

Here again the storm had got in its deadly work. The mountainous waves, washing in the refuse, had choked up the circulating system to the condensers. It was necessary to "cut out" first one turbine, then another, until finally the whole plant was dead.

Ritchie left orders about cleaning out the system, and climbed back into his car for the drive across the city to the main steam plant in the Potrero. It fell upon the Potrero plant now to carry the entire load of the company's service.

The old boyish grin curved Ritchie's lips. Never had there been such a splendid series of calamities. It was as if a kind fate had poured them all into his lap, giving him the chance to prove himself.

He stepped out of the roar of the storm into the deafening roar of the fireroom at the steam plant. Every boiler had been cut in, and the firemen moved back and forth silently, watching the gages and the dials.

With a few words to the foreman, Ritchie climbed to the floor above, where the turbines hummed in demoniac mockery of the raging elements without. Here, too, grave-faced men stood silently alert beside switchboard and generators. It was approaching the hour of the maximum peak, and the steam plant was already heavily overloaded.

Gradually, under their increasing load, the turbines began to slow down. Unless the other plant at North Beach could get back into working order to help them out, the danger point would soon be reached, and it would be necessary to cut out the generators to save them from blowing up.

Amid the din, the tinkle of the telephone sounded, like a tiny toy bell. Ritchie entered the glass-inclosed booth and shut the door.

A woman's voice came crisply over the wire.

"Mr. Ritchie? This is the Central Emergency Hospital. Mr. Atterling and his daughter were in an accident—"

The blood pounded in Ritchie's ears like the roar of the turbines outside, so that he had to shout:

"What? What's that?"

"Automobile accident—coming home," the crisp voice repeated. "Mr. Atterling is conscious now, and has asked me to notify you. He says that you must keep up the service—that you will understand. He appears very anxious—"

"Never mind that! The accident? How badly—"

He felt himself shrieking into the mouthpiece, trying to break through the professional calm of the woman on the other end.

The voice was still as crisply formal.

"Mr. Atterling's injuries are minor. As

soon as they are dressed, he can be taken home. Miss Atterling has been hurt internally, we fear. She has been removed to the St. Francis Hospital, where she can be operated upon."

"But her chances?" Ritchie said, and his voice now seemed to come from far away. "I want the truth, nurse!"

"It is all a case of time, Mr. Ritchie. If they operate in time, she has a good chance. Delay, I fear, would prove fatal. For any further information you had better call up the St. Francis."

He heard the click of the receiver, and hung up his own. He sat there, stunned, unaware that the lights were growing strangely dim.

As he stepped dazedly from the booth, the operator at the electric switchboard turned his head.

"I've cleared the motor generator sets from the line, sir. It wasn't safe to wait any longer. I'm going to clear the direct current side now."

Ritchie nodded dully, his mind only half concerned with what the operator was saying. Despite his efforts to give the city service, both steam plants had failed, and the hydro was out. He had done his best. The rest of it was up to the switchboard operators of the different substations. When they saw the lights going down, they would cut in their storage batteries. They had standing orders to that effect. That would keep the city lighted for a couple of hours, and by the time the emergency batteries died down the steam plants would probably be running again.

Ritchie went through the building, seeing to this and that, giving instructions; but it was largely mechanical. The plant, the service, nothing really mattered at the moment but the girl he loved.

At last he picked up his hat and coat. He was going to the hospital, to ease his agonizing suspense.

As he reached the door, the second switchboard operator, sitting inside the telephone booth, motioned him back. The "trouble desk" at Howard Street had just reported that an apartment house at Hyde and Sutter Streets had phoned in that the lights were out altogether. The switchboard operator at Station D, which supplied the district, had evidently failed to cut in his storage batteries.

"Well, call him up and find out what's wrong," Ritchie ordered hotly.

He knew instinctively that every householder in the neighborhood would be trying to get the "trouble desk" at once. It was the way people always were—fretful, impatient, never realizing the difficulties the company might be facing. The storm had brought the darkness early, and Ritchie sensed the blackness of the night without; yet he felt an angry resentment at the inconsiderateness of the public.

"It wouldn't hurt them," he said, hardly aware that he spoke aloud, "to go without their lights until—"

Something seemed to strike the careless words back into his throat. Hyde and Sutter—that was only a block from the St. Francis Hospital! If the lights were out at Hyde and Sutter, they were out in the hospital. Out in the operating room! And she might even then be on the operating table—and it was a case in which delay might prove fatal!

V

RITCHIE shot into the booth and snatched at the telephone. There was a buzzing on the line, but his voice held a deadly, penetrating quietness.

"Listen, central! Get the number right, and quick. It's life and death!"

Even so, it seemed eternity before McCoy answered from Station D.

"Clear your bus bar and cut in your batteries quick!" Ritchie blazed. "Why are you waiting?"

"The control battery failed. I'm having to cut in the switches by hand."

Ritchie sat back with white face. That meant more precious seconds lost—minutes lost; and he had said that it wouldn't hurt folks to go without their lights for a while!

He took the receiver from the hook again. With that same deadly quiet, though he was inwardly raging at the halting, uncertain telephone service, he called one substation after another of the four that had storage batteries. He must make sure that all had been cut in. There might be other hospitals in darkness, the thread of other lives hanging in the balance.

After he had reached all the substations, he jumped into his car and rushed like a madman to the steam plant at North Beach. He wanted to see with his own eyes what progress was being made in clearing the debris from the circulating system. When he was satisfied on this point, then, and not until then, he called up the St. Francis.

The comfort they gave him was small. Miss Atterling had come safely through the operation, but they could say nothing further for the present.

For the next thirty-six hours, while the storm sullenly raged and gradually died, Ritchie took hardly a minute to eat or sleep. When he went out to his car, to speed across the city to this station or that, he staggered like a drunken man.

He did not take time to go to the hospital to see Jean. He was in the grip of something bigger than himself, something bigger even than his love for Jean Atterling.

It was as if some strange clairvoyance had been given him by which he saw into the myriad homes of the city, into the hospitals, the business houses, the factories. There were people dying—needing light. Little lives were coming into the world—needing light. There was light to be shed on dark places where criminals lurked; light to be poured in shadowed rooms where men sweated and toiled; light to ease the tears of sorrow; light for the joyous-hearted. There were the street cars to keep running, the busy wheels of industry to keep turning.

It was not merely Ritchie's duty to the company—it was his responsibility to humanity. He knew now the difference between soulless corporations and corporations with a soul.

VI

As suddenly as the storm had broken, the wind died and the rain ceased. The city lay peaceful and golden in the beauty of a spring day. Barges swung gently in the Golden Gate, repairing the submarine cables. Men were on the job at Auburn.

Atterling, a trifle pale beneath the bandages across his forehead, but as energetic as ever, was back at his desk. Broxton reclined on a couch at home, still unable to return to work, but quite capable of handling a telephone. Henley had left Pitt River. The turbines hummed at North Beach and roared at the Potrero.

Ritchie stumbled home and to bed. Only the insistent jangle of the telephone dragged him from his lethargy in the late afternoon. It was a nurse at the St. Francis calling to say that Miss Atterling was asking for him, and wished to see him.

The nurse was pleasantly reassuring as he stalked after her down the long corridor.

Then she opened the door, and he tiptoed in. He was alone with Jean.

As she turned her face to him, white and still shadowed with pain, all that he had planned to say choked in his throat, so that he uttered only the one passionate syllable of her name:

"Jean!"

Speech appeared to come hard to her, too. He could not know that she was as shocked at his drawn, haggard face as he had been at sight of hers.

He drew a chair awkwardly beside the bed. The terror of the other night was again upon him. Suppose she was not as well as the nurse had given him to understand? Nurses always made a business of letting a fellow think that everything was all right. It was part of a nurse's training to be the sort of glad *Pollyanna* that he had been.

"You—you *are* better, Jean?" he blundered tactlessly. "You—will be all right?"

"Right as ever, John Ritchie! You see, they operated just in time. The doctor told me about it afterward. The lights went out just as I was taking the ether, and the doctor thought it was the end. It seemed ages to him, he said; and then the lights came on. That was what saved me—the lights!" She paused. "President Mead was here this morning. John, I know how you gave them service!"

The color flooded John Ritchie's hollow cheeks.

"Suppose I hadn't!" he said chokingly. "Suppose I had dodged the responsibility, and left it to the other man!" He looked away, trying to formulate the thing he had wanted to tell her all along. "I know what it means now," he blurted—"what your father and you meant by 'service.'"

Jean watched him, on her face a wistful eagerness, as if she was waiting for him to say more. He was staring at his hands.

"John," she began with strange hesitancy, "could you, *would* you, ask me again what you asked me on that last night we walked home together?"

He turned his eyes upon her hungrily; but he could not take her. He felt that he was not worthy of her. He tried to speak, but this time he could not bring even the one syllable of her name to his lips.

Suddenly he dropped on his knees beside the bed, took her thin, white hand, and laid it against his cheek. He was sobbing with the restrained, racking grief of a man.

His sobbing jarred her bed, but her face showed no signs of added pain. It was alight with the wordless understanding that she had hitherto given only to her father. She reached over and laid her other hand on the dark mass of his hair.

"It's all right, John," she said. "It's all right—dear!"

DELIVER US FROM EVIL

AFRAID I could not do my part—

The thing I longed so much to do—

My trembling hand forgot its art;

I made my fear come true.

Because I thought I could not sing

The song that swelled within my throat,

When I had hoped the tones would ring,

I raised a harsh, discordant note.

And love that should have crowned my life,

Without which I must walk alone—

Doubt stabbed it with a stealthy knife;

I did not dare to claim my own.

So this one prayer I send above,

And may the Power that made me hear—

Deny my art of life, my love,

But oh, cast out my fear!

Grace MacGowan Cooke

The Man of the Miracle

THE STRANGE STORY OF A MODERN MEDICAL MYSTERY

By Vance Thompson

Author of "Eat and Grow Thin," "The Carnival of Destiny," etc.

JOHAN BARKER MACRAW, familiarly known as "J. B.," and Hiram Jenks are veterans of Wall Street, partners in the banking house of Jenks & Macraw. Jenks suddenly disappears, and his partner searches for him in vain, until a stranger who introduces himself as Dr. Ira Cree informs Macraw that the missing man is in his sanatorium—where he invites J. B. to call, warning him that he will see a great change in the appearance of his friend. To Macraw's amazement, he finds old Hiram rejuvenated by some mysterious process, and as full of health and strength as he was at twenty-five. He disgusts J. B. by announcing that he is about to marry a young girl, Madelon Starr; and he insists on taking his place in the bank, where the clerks are told that old Mr. Jenks has gone away for his health, and that this youthful replica of him is his son.

Jenks lends his car and his chauffeur, Dan Shanahan, to Miss Starr, who lives with an elderly woman named Mrs. Dowsing; and she goes to call at Dr. Cree's sanatorium. This is a place of mystery, with rooms weirdly bathed in colored lights. The doctor's household consists of a nurse, Ada Calamy, and a boy, Claude Allingham, whom the doctor professes to have changed from a negro to a white.

XII

"**W**HOO let you in?" inquired Ada Calamy, as Madelon Starr opened the door of Dr. Cree's reception room and walked in.

"That frightful boy," Madelon replied.

"He gives me the shivers."

"You don't look well, dear," Ada said soothingly. "Sit down here and let me get you something. A cup of tea?"

"No. Is Dr. Cree at home?"

"Yes—he is upstairs."

Madelon wandered about the room with weary aimlessness, going finally to the window and looking out into the street.

"There is that white nigger talking to my chauffeur! What's he talking to my chauffeur for?"

"Why shouldn't he, Mad? The poor little wretch has to talk to some one. Come, dear!"

Ada put her arm around the girl, drew her to a sofa, and sat down by her side.

"It's a vile day," Madelon said.

"Yes. There is something in the air—a storm, perhaps. Is that what is the matter with you?"

Ada had taken one of the girl's hands in hers. She worked the glove off slowly and

disclosed the great star sapphire, with its heart of buried light; and always she held the little hand and stroked it softly.

"What is it, Mad?"

For a while Madelon did not answer. She crouched there on the big sofa, irresolute and suffering; but she did not withdraw her hand. At last she said sullenly:

"I've had enough of it, Ada. That is what's the matter."

Ada waited, stroking the little hand. Her gentle, delicate face was always grave, always shadowy with vague unhappiness; but now a keener anxiety flashed into it. She did not speak, but sat there, waiting.

"Yes, I have had enough—more than enough," Madelon continued, her sulky voice rising to a note of anger. "Don't you think so yourself?"

"You have done a great deal for us, dear—for both of us. You have done everything!" Ada replied gently.

"Not for both of you—not for him! Thank God, I did it for you; and I do not even know why I did it for you! Because you are my sister, I suppose."

"Perhaps it was that, dear. There are only the two of us, and if we lose each other there can't be much left. Destiny made us sisters—each for the other."

"That's just what makes it so terrible! I know how much of your life you gave to me when I was a brawling brat—year after year. And you know what I have done for you; but the terrible part is that I didn't do it of my own free will, or just because you are you. Don't you see? It is as if I was forced to do it, just because we are sisters, made that way whether we wanted to be or not—as if we were tied together. I haven't even the credit of having done it out of pure love. I did it because I couldn't help doing it for a sister, just because we were both born of some people who died before I could remember."

"You would have loved them in just the same way, little Mad," Ada said. "I mean in spite of yourself—because you couldn't help it."

"I suppose so. You have been father, mother, and sister to me; and that makes it worse, for, you see, I can't go on. I'm done, Ada!"

"Tell me."

"I'm afraid!"

"Of what, dear?"

"Everything—and that damned old woman!"

"Mrs. Dowsing? What has happened?"

"Everything—nothing; but it will happen. Do you think I'm going to be the sweet little girl sacrifice—and for him? You know I don't mind what I do for you, but why should I have to suffer for him?"

Ada's face had grown very white, but she still clung to the little hand and caressed it gently.

"Why did you make him marry you?" Madelon asked sharply.

"I didn't make him marry me," Ada said slowly. "No! What did I care? I would have gone with him anyhow. You don't understand."

"I ought to understand by this time. I know how soft you are."

"No, it is not what you think. My life was so meaningless; and when he came—please listen, Mad—it was just like a light shining in and making it beautiful. He wasn't the light, you know, but it is shining in him, too. It is something from above. You only see the man he is, and that isn't the same thing. What you have done for us—yes, for both of us—"

"Oh, stop talking about him! I'm done. I mean it." Madelon jerked her hand away. "What do you think I'm made of? I don't want to listen to any more love talk

—not now, thank you! I know you'd give your head for that man, but why mine? Why my head, too? Oh, I don't blame you. I did it myself. I thought it was a beautiful thing to do; and I liked to see myself doing noble things. It made me proud, of course. Noble little me! Clever little me, to help dear old Ada out of a hole! Me to the rescue!"

"If it had been only for me, dear, I would not have let you lift a finger; but he has to have me—oh, I know him—or the wonderful good in him will perish. The light would go out," Ada added softly.

"And that is love?" Madelon asked, with a sudden glance at her sister's face.

"Yes."

"And to keep him—that tallow fellow!—lighted up, as you call it. I am to be the goat. Me for the wilderness! Is that it?" Then, as her sister shrank back and covered her face with her hands, Madelon added remorsefully: "Oh, don't, Ada! I didn't mean to hurt you; but don't you see, dear old Ada, I can't go on—I'm frightened!"

"I am always frightened," her sister whispered. She raised her head. "And I have been very selfish, but not for myself—I hope not."

"What does it matter? Never mind! What am I good for, anyway?"

"Hush, dear!" They heard the rattle of the knob as the door opened. "It's Ira."

Dr. Cree came toward them, glittering, suave, and smiling. He crossed the floor in his soft-stepping way, as if there were fur on his feet, and greeted Madelon with casual good nature.

She stood up; for, crouching there on the sofa, she seemed to herself too small, too insignificant, for what she had to say. She was afraid, and fear always made her violent. Indeed, it was only when fear crowded her hardest that she could throw herself against obstacles, as a bull charges a wall. She must act at once, she knew, for it was not real courage that drove her on, but a wild impulse that might leave her at any moment. She must think only of herself and of him, she told herself, for if she thought of Ada her determination would wobble and break; so she faced the doctor steadily, confronting him with set lips and irritated eyes.

"I've just told Ada," she began calmly enough, "and I'm done. I can't go on. I want my own way—to be myself."

"It is her marriage," Ada interposed, answering the doctor's querying look. "Mrs. Dowsing has told her it mustn't take place. I'm sure that is it!"

Madelon had joined Dr. Cree where he stood near the table. He put his arm around her protectively and drew her to him. It was evident that Ada's explanation had stirred him deeply—that it was, indeed, worse than anything he had expected; but he only said:

"Yes—tell me about it."

"I'm not to be ordered around by Mrs. Dowsing! And mark my words, I shall do what I please, go where I please, marry whom I please! If you can take care of yourself, Ira Cree, you had better set about it, for I am done!"

The girl spoke resolutely, leaning hard on her anger and keeping up her defiance in spite of the fact that the big, somber man—for all the glitter seemed to have faded from him—impressed her as being something larger and more formidable than herself.

"Take care of myself, Madelon?" the doctor replied. "If that were all!"

It was not boastfully spoken, but there was a sort of gloomy consequence about the man, as if he had only to reach out his hand in order to steady himself upon something stable and mysterious—upon something as stable and mysterious as the law of life and death. That was the impression he gave the girl—as if in his dark converse with the forces of life he had learned some deadly secret. He stared down at her thoughtfully—at the young, defiant face and the rough, boyish hair.

"Then I wish you would," Madelon answered. "If you can take care of yourself, what am I doing here?"

"There is Ada, too," the doctor returned, "and you."

"Me?"

"You more than any one else, Madelon," he continued. "At present it is you alone. That is why it is so hard. If it were only Ada and myself, perhaps I wouldn't try to hold you. I would be only too glad. Ada and I"—he drew the woman closer to him—"can take care of ourselves. There is always a way; but you, Madelon? I wish I could tell you to do what you please, go where you please—marry him and roll in his money; but I can't tell you that. You can't go where you please. There is a chain on your leg that will pull you back

from the ends of the earth; and you can't break it!"

"You got me into it," the girl exclaimed, but her defiance was dying out, and the fear was pushing harder than ever.

"You were forced to come in to help us out; but does that matter now? You are in, don't you see? You can pull down the roof on us, but you, too, are under the roof, and whatever happens to us will also happen to you. I can't help you to break out alone, Ada can't help you, but all three of us together—ah!"

It was an exclamation of self-confidence, as if triumph were already in his hand; and Ada seemed to find comfort in it and renewed assurance.

"Oh, be patient, dear, and trust him," she said. "Ira knows."

Madelon gave a little despairing cry of anger and hopelessness. She had known that he would be too strong for her. What could she do in the face of his huge, obscure strength, and, worse still, in the face of her sister's beseeching feebleness? She might have known! Of a sudden her helplessness seemed limitless as a sea.

What she did, for good or evil, was almost always due to an impulse. She did a thing and then wondered. When she came upon an obstacle which she could not break down, she accepted it as something as final as a rock, or as a fact. For her an obstacle was not something that might be gone around. It was decisive and definite, and there was nothing more to be done in that direction; so she went back from it as a bull, after once vainly charging a wall, goes back into the open field.

Her violent impulse for liberty—to get her freedom—had been stopped by the doctor's statement, heavy with unuttered threats of disaster. She had come to the wall. Her courage dropped dead, and she made a little weary gesture that acknowledged her defeat.

Dr. Cree, recognizing victory, had recovered his usual ready and expansive optimism. He smiled once more, confidently, and a little of his brilliant air of masterfulness came back to him. More and more he began to be his old conquering self—that fathomless and undiscovered man who had swept these women into his depths, as the tempestuous sea submerges little wandering boats.

"Trust me, Madelon, of course." He bent toward her and exhorted her grandly.

"I will see to this as I see to everything. After all, I am I—"

He paused, for Madelon, maddened by that self-sufficient voice, with its awful mystery of hidden power, rushed toward the door and threw it open. She almost fell over Claude Allingham.

"Damn you, get out of my way!" she shouted hysterically, and threw him across the hall.

The car was waiting, drawn up to the curb, but she did not see it. She did not hear Shanahan's call as she sped down the street, filled with rotting leaves and dust and cries.

As she ran on in wild flight, the storm broke. It fell out of the hot, black clouds, and it was hot and black itself—a storm hostile to humanity. The wind caught her up and drove her on through the blasts of blinding rain—as helpless as the withered leaves that were blown along with her, but alive and suffering.

XIII

WHEN Madelon entered the sanatorium, Dan Shanahan had caught a glimpse of the melancholy boy who opened the door for her; and Claude attracted him. It was not only that the boy's bleached face and his hair—like an astrakhan cap pulled down to the ears—struck him as interesting, but, as well, Claude's look of gloomy discontent appealed to him. A cheery, self-satisfied boy would not have attracted him; for Shanahan was always on the side of the malcontents.

A little later, therefore, when he saw that extraordinary head peering from the basement, he winked in a friendly way and beckoned. Claude, with crafty side glances, as if he were working his way through a jungle, gradually approached the motor car where Dan sat, smoking.

"Want a cigarette, young un?"

The boy nodded, took the cigarette, and stuck it in over his ear, under the thatch of crinkly hair.

"Aren't you going to smoke it?"

"Not now," Claude replied, with a pause between the words, as if they had no connection with each other.

"You're a talkative young beggar, aren't you?" Dan remarked.

"Yes," Claude said, drawling on. "I talk to myself."

His arms hung loose at his sides. His mouth, with purplish lips, was half open;

his face was the color of wet plaster; and he stared at Shanahan with soft, protuberant eyes.

"Say, what are you, anyhow?" Dan asked abruptly.

"I'm a white boy," Claude replied, not without a show of pride. Then his voice broke. "But I dream black," he added in a whisper.

Shanahan almost fell off the seat.

"Geel!" he gasped.

It was a moment before the chauffeur could get his breath again. At last he asked suspiciously:

"Did any one put you up to saying that to me? Say!"

The boy wagged his head in slow denial.

"What's your name?"

"Claude Allingham."

"Good Gawd!" exclaimed Dan. "Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Come in the car here and sit down, Claudie." Dan shoved himself over and made a place for the boy. "Squat there. Now what's that you said?"

Claude glanced round watchfully, as if to make sure that they were alone. Then, in his thick, mysterious whisper, he said again:

"I dream black."

"That gets me!" Dan muttered. "Me, too!" he added mysteriously, leaning toward the boy.

"What too?"

"Me," said Dan. "I'm American, and I dream Irish."

They looked at each other with awful complicity, as if they had touched something too dark for words. It was Dan who spoke first.

"What's the worst of 'em?"

"I don't know," Claude answered with painful deliberation.

"Me," explained Dan, "it's a turf boat. It's got a black hull. Sure—a black hull, an' it's a turf boat, an' I know it, though I never saw one. An' it comes driftin' down my dream, and then, just when I think it's goin' out of sight, the damn black thing comes driftin' up stream again. An' there it is—all night. Sometimes it's in me an' sometimes I'm in it—the turf boat—driftin' up an' down, an' both of us Irish. Say, that's the way I dream all night—an' me an American!"

Claude Allingham had listened without interest. Indeed, he had few interests out-

side himself. When Dan paused on a note of disgust, he began to speak in his slow, dragging way, his words falling from his heavy lips one after the other, like something dripping from a shelf.

"When I go into my dream," he began, "I'm in the dark, and warm. And I crawl on my belly to a little door, and stick my head out, and there's the sun coming up. And all around, in a circle, there's a lot of little houses—like hats. And I see a crowd of colored men, all sticking their heads out of little doors and sniffing—like that!"

He had been talking in a precise, school-boy way, but gradually he slipped into more racial speech, rhythmic and slow.

"There's a lot of dogs prowlin' around and fightin'; and goats—little goats. And I crawl out of the little house and stand up, and then I done see the birds. I dunno what them birds are. They got bald heads, like ole white men, and they lets out a sort o' mournful cry that jes' makes yo' sick at yo' stomach. And they's always a lot o' red eagles, mounstrous red eagles, flyin' aroun' and aroun' in my dream."

"Geel!" said Dan. "That's worse than mine!"

"That ain't the worse. The worse comes later. I got to sit there all day, lookin' at them little houses—like hats. And they's a power o' colored chillern, crawlin' everywhere and howlin', and colored ladies wif black legs, shovin' 'em about, and colored men, sittin' in the sun, eatin' an' eatin'. And they's one colored man, he climbs up a tree, and I watch him, but I can't see the top of the tree. And he goes on up, and he never come down no mo'! Why dat nigger stay up dat tree?"

"Say, you're some little dreamer!" said Dan admiringly.

"He never come down," Claude's sing-song went on. It was as if the beat of a tom-tom underann the words and gave them rhythm. "And I sit in the sun and wait fo' that colored man to come down dat tree. And dem colored ladies run everywhere like ants, they so desp'rit busy. And me and the colored men jes' sit there, till the sun he begin to go down. Nobody say nuffin to me. And the big trees they come up closer aroun' the little houses, and I think certain they's goin' to walk over 'em. And ev'ybody get afraid. And the wild beasts, under the trees, they howl like they was in a circus. And the trees they keep a comin' closer and closer, and walkin' high. And

the colored men all creep in the little houses, on they bellies, and the colored ladies and chillern. And I say I'd better go in. And I try to get in the little door. And somebody he say: 'Get out, white boy!' And he done kick me in the head. All them houses won't let me come in. They's a mounstrous lot of houses—more'n eighty houses, mebbe. I can smell 'em inside, them colored people, and they all smell warm and safe; but somebody allus kick my head out. And I is powerful scared, and I jes' lie dere, lookin' at them trees comin' closer and gettin' ready to walk ovah them houses. And them wild beasts fum de circus keep a comin' and a comin', and they's all howlin'. And I is so scared I can't move a leg no mo'."

"You're a bright little play boy," said Dan, "in your sleep!"

"Dat ain't the worse, nohow. In a while, soon, in the dark, jes' a yellow moon a shinin', I see ghosts—and they is all black ghosts!" The boy's jaws dropped, and his eyes were rolling in his head. "Black ghosts—and they keeps a creepin' close and champin' they white teef at me, till I gives a big yell. And dat sort o' wakes me up, and I sits up in my bed, wif sheets and a pillow, fo' I is a white boy, I is, but—I dream black!"

The thick, slow chant ended, and Claude gave a sudden start, as if he had indeed just emerged from tumultuous sleep—sleep heavy and troubled as a jungle.

"Say, do you do that often?" Dan asked suspiciously.

Shanahan had a racial objection to people who talked about ghosts, even in the daytime. Ghosts were all nonsense, he knew, but it doesn't make one's nights safer to talk about them.

"That is my dream," said Claude, who had recovered his exact schoolboy speech.

"You sure are some play boy!" Shanahan repeated. "What do you do, anyway, when you're awake?"

"What do I do?"

"Yes. Do you work in there?"

Dan glanced at the sanatorium of Dr. Ira Cree.

"I live there," Claude answered.

"Don't you work, young un?"

Claude nodded his head.

"I'm his assistant," he boasted, "and the butler."

"You are, eh? Say, what sort of a shop is it? What do they do in there?"

Claude looked down at his hands, put them in the pockets of his jacket, and then glanced up at the chauffeur, but made no reply. The old look of timidity came over his face, and with it a mask that Dan knew well—that impenetrable mask of stupidity behind which the men of primitive races hide their alert suspicions.

"And you're a wise little play boy, too, eh, Claudie? What the devil do I care what you do in there? You'd better run indoors and buttle, little butler. Don't stay out here and spoil your complexion," Dan advised. "Here, take another cigarette! To buttle properly you ought to have one behind each ear."

The boy grinned and took the cigarette.

"Do you ever get a day off? You do, eh? Some time I'll take you in the car and show you the Avenue. And now depart, Claudie. It's time you were buttlng!"

Shanahan watched the boy slink into the house by way of the basement. He wondered how much longer the high heels would keep him waiting. He did not feel that he was honoring his profession of "secretary chauffeur" by driving Miss Madelon Starr about town. Even her chirpy friendliness, and the winsomeness of her smile, did not lift her in his estimation. It was not only the high heels that he disapproved, or the way she powdered her nose and smoked cigarettes in his car. Instinctively, racially, he objected to everything that differentiated her from the "dacent woman" in a red petticoat, with a shawl over her head and her arms in a tub.

It seemed to him that she had a fatal charm. After putting her comether on old Mr. Jenks, she had got her hooks into his new boss, who didn't seem any more capable of taking care of himself than the old boss had been. Those Jenkses were a weak-minded lot where a petticoat was concerned—and she wasn't long on petticoats at that! Silk stockings, and a brick top, and an "oh, please do" sort of smile were enough to bowl over a Jenks, old or young.

What worried Shanahan most was the trouble the young boss was laying up for himself. He knew old Hiram and his devastating temper, and he could imagine clearly just what the old boy would do to the lad when he came back. Wigs on the green! Shanahan made up his respectable mind that it was his duty to both his bosses to put a lid on the red head and the high heels.

He took out a cigarette, but the match he lit went out in a sudden puff of wind. The street was a chaos of blown dust and leaves; and suddenly the hot clouds cracked open, to let through great waves of pale lightning and windy splashes of rain.

An evil storm; and through it he saw Madelon—first poised on the steps, as if dazed by the sheets of lightning, and then speeding down the street, with bent head, her gray coat flapping like wings. He called to her, but she paid no heed. He pulled out after her, but when he reached the corner she had already vanished.

Slowly he drove on, keeping an eye out for Madelon; but he did not consider that it was any business of his to go hunting for wild girls in a storm. Anyhow, some one would find her. Some one always did find girls like that.

"I suppose it's up to me to tell the young boss," he decided.

Turning into the avenue, he brought the car up at the door of Hiram's dignified apartment house. He learned from the porter that Mr. Jenks had not come in. He did not quite see what message he could leave. He couldn't very well tell the porter to inform Mr. Jenks, with Shanahan's compliments, that Miss Starr had flown the coop.

He stood there in the wide, low hall, debating the matter in his mind, rubbing his battered chin. Luckily, in a moment, Hiram dashed in, laughing and shaking the rain from his hat.

"Nice day, isn't it? That you, Dan?"

"Yes, Mr. Jenks, I've got the car," said Dan, looking at his young and joyous boss.

"Though what he's got to laugh about," he added, to himself, "I dunno, and the old boy liable to come back any time."

He wondered how much it would be good for him to know. Finally he said:

"Miss Starr told me to say that she was much obliged for the auto. She left me at Dr. Cree's."

"That's all right," replied Hiram pleasantly. "This is no day for being out."

He went toward the elevator door. Dan did not feel called upon to inform him that Madelon was out, flapping through the storm. There was never anything gained by stirring up a Jenks unnecessarily; so Dan gave his boss a friendly farewell, and waited until the elevator carried Hiram and his young fortunes to an upper floor. Then he sauntered away, drawing on his wet

driving gloves, and glancing around the spacious hall.

What he saw jerked an exclamation out of him.

From one of the leathern seats an old woman in black rose stiffly, and walked slowly toward the street door. Shanahan recognized her in an instant. It was her old face that he had seen peering from the window in Eleventh Street. It was she whom he had seen slipping up from the area as he drove away from that house.

What had brought the old girl here? Why had she been camping back there in a corner just at the time his boss came in? If it was for him she had come, why hadn't she spoken to him?

Shanahan's wits worked quickly. As she came out, the storm slapped her, and she paused with a little gasp of distress.

"You'll be going back to Eleventh Street, ma'am," Dan said, touching his cap. "You'd better let me run you down there in the car. I've been driving Miss Starr, you know."

"You are acquainted with me?" she asked. "I am Miss Starr's housekeeper—Mrs. Dowsing."

"Of course, ma'am—that's why I spoke."

"I'll be very thankful to you if you will take me home."

"Sure! Why wouldn't I? Make a run for it, now. That umbrella's no good to you at all!"

He caught the old woman by the arm, hurried her across to the car, opened the door to the driver's seat, thrust her in, and jumped in after her.

Mrs. Dowsing was a trifle breathless, but almost at once she recovered her hard placidity. As they crept down the avenue—sliding from blaring street lamps into patches of windy blackness and out again—she began to speak.

"You took her home?" she inquired.

It was curious that thereafter Madelon became merely "she" for both of them.

"I did not," Dan replied.

"Where is she?"

"Search me!" said Dan.

He explained how Madelon had left him waiting, and had run down the street into the rain—and she in them dinky little shoes and a coat like wings. He hoped she'd be none the worse for it.

"It won't hurt her," Mrs. Dowsing answered. "Nothing does."

"Knows how to take care of herself, eh, ma'am?"

"How long were you with old Mr. Jenks?"

"Me? Eight years. A fine old boy!"

"And the young man?"

"Well, of course he's a Jenks, too, but you see I like that kind of boss," Shanahan confessed.

"And you knew Mr. Macraw?"

"Eight years. We get on all right."

"Drive slow. I want you to hear me. You don't want trouble to come on Mr. Jenks—on them all?"

"Go on," said Dan. "Let's hear it! It's her, eh? What's she up to? I don't want her to bite my young boss, if that's what you mean."

"You know what she did to old Mr. Jenks," Mrs. Dowsing began, as if she was feeling her way toward a confidence.

"She sure had the old man going some, if I could judge by the motions he made."

"She played with him, lied to him, did everything to get him. I suppose that is why he has gone away. He must have found her out. Not that he's any better than she is, but he's an old man, and she is a—"

"Well, she wasn't born yesterday, either."

"Do you know who she is?" Mrs. Dowsing continued. "That Calamy woman who is living with Dr. Cree is her sister—her own sister. That's the kind of people they are!"

Mrs. Dowsing's acid voice ran on and on. Dan did not interrupt her, listening not only to her words, but to the tone of bitterness that ran through them.

"By the way she talks to people who are better than she is, you'd think she was born on a throne! I don't say it wouldn't have served old Mr. Jenks right if she had captured him, but it seems as if he got away from her. Where is he? When is he coming home?"

Dan told her he did not know.

"He'd better come as soon as he can, and you'd better tell Mr. Macraw to get him at once. The old man wasn't enough for her, and now it's the young one. I won't have it! I won't have it!" she repeated with cold obstinacy. "She comes in with her impudence, saying 'hello' as if she were talking to a slave, and tells me calmly that she's going to marry him. She!"

"I heard about that from Timmins, but I thought he was lying," Dan said. "He usually is."

"He mustn't do it! You must tell him about the way she carried on with his father—the shameless thing she is!"

"I see myself doing it! Why didn't you tell him? What were you up there at the house for?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Dowsing answered reluctantly. "I don't know why I didn't tell him."

"Afraid to, eh? Me, too! I know them Jenkses."

"Can't you find his father?"

Shanahan brought the car to, in front of the house in Eleventh Street. There was a lull in the storm; the rain had stopped. He helped Mrs. Dowsing out.

"I'm no little trouble-maker," he said, "where Jenkses are concerned. I don't blame you for not wanting to butt in between them, even feeling the way you do about that girl. If it ain't up to you, it may be up to Mr. Macraw. I dunno."

"You'll tell him?"

"I'll think a little while," Dan replied, as he climbed back into his seat. "I often do that."

But his thoughts did not take him anywhere. They went around and around the frigid Mrs. Dowsing. What was her little game, anyhow? What was her real objection to the marriage—and to her mistress, Miss Starr? She was merely the housekeeper—a sort of upper servant. Then what business was it of hers if Miss Starr gave herself airs, and if old Hiram and young Hiram locked horns?

Shanahan couldn't make it out. Above all, he couldn't see what he had to do in this tangle of motives and wills. He knew that playing at Providence is a dangerous game. Some one always gets hurt, and it is usually the very person you want to help.

"It 'll take a good bit of thinking over," he reflected.

Meanwhile the car was running, as if of its own volition, toward Gramercy Park.

XIV

In the parlor of his old-fashioned house near Gramercy Park Mr. Macraw sat alone, waiting for the coming of his partner, Hiram Jenks. It was early in the evening, but he had already dined, and there was coffee on a little table at his elbow. The great room was crudely lighted, and the

heavy, ornate pieces of furniture stood out against the papered walls, proclaiming their age and their offensive pomposity. They dated from the velvet and mahogany days of long ago.

Over the empty fireplace hung an oval portrait of the wife who had once wandered, in dainty idleness, through the majestic room, or tapped out little waltzes on the keys of the square piano. She must have been a pretty woman, if the smoothly painted portrait was anything like her. The face was rather short and round, with large eyes and a whimsical little mouth that seemed to be hiding a smile of faint derision. The throat was full and firm, and the shoulders sloped away whitely into the lace of a carefully painted dinner gown. The head was carried slightly to one side, as if bent under the weight of the yellow hair coiled on top of it.

The picture was not a masterpiece, by any means, but it did have a vital quality. There seemed to be life in the large blue eyes, which stared out over the old banker's head as if they were watching the door in perpetual expectation.

Mr. Macraw was not looking at the portrait. With one rheumatic leg over the other, he sat hunched up in a velvet chair, smoking. His eyes were half closed, and a scowl pulled together his gray eyebrows.

He was thinking of a conversation he had had, just before dinner, with Shanahan—a dogmatic Shanahan, who had talked defiantly through his broken teeth, demanding to be told where old Hiram Jenks was to be found, insisting upon seeing old Hiram Jenks. Of course, he had a reason. The reason was a woman, and her hard heels had clattered through Shanahan's talk like castanets.

"The name on her is Miss Starr," he had said.

Other things he had said; and what seemed to loom darkest in the little Irishman was his dread of what would happen between "them fiery Jenkses" if the young boss married Madelon Starr. He spoke of Madelon without reticence.

Mr. Macraw's thoughts went by a different road. Passing Miss Starr, they arrived at Hiram Jenks, and the bank, and himself. Now, over a cigar, which did not soothe him, old J. B. was waiting for Hiram to appear in answer to a message telephoned to his apartment. He meant to have it out with Hiram.

Always the portrait smiled—a vague, secretive smile. Beneath it, on the mantelpiece, a huge gilt clock ticked away the minutes. It seemed to the banker that time was wastefully running away, like water from a tap; but in fact it was still early in the evening when Hiram Jenks sauntered in, smoking a cigarette.

At the sight of his partner gayly dangling the cigarette between two fingers, J. B. reared up and shouted:

"What the mischief is that you are smoking?"

"They hadn't come in much in the days when we were young, J. B.," Hiram said with a grin. "Somehow or other they seem to go with youth, so I thought I'd better break myself in. They are nasty little things," he added, tossing the cigarette into a brass bowl on the table. "Give me one of your big cigars."

"Help yourself," J. B. grunted.

The exasperating Hiram was in evening dress, slender and handsome, a flower in his buttonhole, a halo of youth around his head. The fellow beamed, confound him!

He lounged about the room in his conquering way, and finally posed, leaning one elbow on the piano, while he took the first joy of J. B.'s good cigar. He looked too confoundedly happy—too confoundedly young and happy. Old J. B. thought he could put a damper on some of that cheery self-satisfaction, and he chuckled grimly to himself.

Hiram, meanwhile, was quite at ease. His brown eyes, with the light of something that was akin to genius in them, roved around the room, rested for a moment on the oval portrait over the mantelpiece, lingered there with indefinable scrutiny, and then turned to his partner.

"I suppose there is something up, or you wouldn't have hauled me out a night like this," he remarked at last. "What is it, J. B.?"

"Don't you sit down any more?"

Mr. Jenks laughed and pulled up a chair.

"It's not particularly pleasant to sit in one's own house," Mr. Macraw said, "and try and talk to a fellow who stands up like a damned monument, looking down on one. I certainly wanted to see you—or, rather, I wanted to talk to you, for I can't say I was particularly anxious to look at you. That flower—and a cigarette! I say, Hiram, why don't you put one of those little round glasses in your eye, eh?"

"You're in a nice little mood to-night," the unruffled Hiram answered coolly, as he glanced down and admired his legs.

"Never mind the mood, Hiram!"

In spite of himself, J. B. was softening. Watching this man who was so dear to him, who had so strangely stepped back into a youth they had once shared, old memories of many kindly hours came back to him. For a moment the room seemed haunted with little songs and faint, mocking laughter—long dead. She had always laughed at Hiram, the woman of the portrait, and at the desperate youthfulness to which he had clung when the brown hair was thinning and the wrinkles began to creep sidewise from his eyes. Perhaps even now there was a hint of faded derision on the painted lips, as this hanky-pankied fellow flaunted in the old room.

Old Hiram, bone of J. B.'s business bone! Old Hiram, the only living witness of the days of his own youth and struggle and triumph! In spite of hanky-panky—

"Hiram," he began, with a stir of affection in his old heart, "you know I never butted into your affairs—outside of business. I've seen you do things I thought downright silly, and never said a word. I just let you get out of your darned troubles yourself—except in business; but now I've got to butt in, and it's not an easy thing to do."

Mr. Jenks had been gradually shrinking down in his chair, as he listened to the kindly, worried voice of his old partner. His attitude had something of the stiffness and rigidity of age.

"Well, get it over, J. B."

"You are not going to marry that girl—I mean Miss Starr."

"I am."

"You are not"—J. B. snapped out the words—"until you know all about her."

"Well?" Hiram asked quietly, leaning forward stiffly, elbow on knee.

"I suppose I have to tell you. I hope you'll keep that damned temper of yours in your pocket. I know all about her. By Heavens, I even know her name, which is more than you do!"

Hiram gave no sign of intending to speak.

"It's not Starr," J. B. went on. "It may be Madelon, though I don't think any decent woman"—he must have got that from one Shanahan—"was ever baptized with a name like that. Anyway, she's a sister of that nurse woman who is living

with that Cree doctor fellow. They put her on you to get you into their hocus-pocus factory. Now that they've made you look like that"—J. B. thrust out a finger at his partner—"and weakened your mind, they are going to marry you to her, and keep you in the family. That family!"

Still Hiram did not speak.

"I'm telling you for your own good—and for mine. It'll be a nice thing for me and the bank to be dragged into a thing like that! It will take a lot of explaining, and Lord knows I've got enough explaining to do about you as it is. No, Hiram," he went on with harsher emphasis, "none of that! That girl's just a common—"

"Hold on!" Hiram interposed quickly. His handsome face was flushed; but suddenly he threw back his shoulders and laughed—noisily, joyously, youthfully. "Oh, you old J. B.!"

"Glad you can grin over it! Bah!"

"You're all wrong, J. B.; though of course some of your facts are right. I know all about Madelon, and all about Ada. Of course they are sisters. Ada is one of the best women on earth. She took care of that little girl—they were orphans—and there's nothing I wouldn't do for her. She's a good woman, J. B. She is Dr. Cree's wife, too, don't forget it, though I suppose they may have their own reasons for not blating about it—perhaps because he's had to use her as a nurse. Like most of these scientists, he hasn't had much money. As for that little Madelon, J. B.—what does her name matter? Girls always like to take up a new name when they go in for an artistic career; and that was her ambition in life—to be a singer and support herself, poor little thing!"

Hiram's voice was serious now, and deep sincerity underlay it.

"As for her, she is as good as gold. I did meet her first, and through her I met Dr. Cree. You are right so far; but she didn't urge me to try the experiment, J. B.—for it was an experiment, and I might have paid for it with my life. Do you know why she didn't wish me to try it? Because she loved me—loved me even as I was then, an old man with a young heart, at whom many a girl would have laughed. She loved me, I tell you! And she begged me not to take the risk of it."

Mr. Macraw had been slowly puffing up until he looked like a ruffled old eagle, red-eyed, bald, and explosive.

"But d-d-damn it!" he managed to bring out, and then the words came with a rush: "That girl knew all about it! When she was foonzling with that fat fortune-teller, pretending she didn't know where you were! Knew it all the time! And when you came prancing into her parlor without your wig, she knew you, eh? And play-acting away about her uncle Hiram! Bah! Bah! Pretended she didn't know you! Didn't know the Cree doctor man! Her own brother-in-law! What was all that lying for? I begin to think, Hiram—"

"My fault, J. B. It was all my idea," Hiram protested. "Madelon was not to blame. I insisted on it. I arranged it. You see, I wanted to break it to you easy. How did I know how you'd take it? You are pretty cranky sometimes, J. B. I wanted you to see that other people were sharing your difficulty. I wanted you to see just what you and I were going to be up against, after my—well, my rejuvenation. Come now, wasn't that really the best way to break it to you?"

"First it's hanky-panky and then it's play-acting," the old man growled. "Now what's next?"

"It was all for your sake, J. B. I insisted on that little preparation for your sake; and Madelon."

"I never thought that girl was what she looked like, anyhow!"

"It was my suggestion, my own idea. After much persuasion Madelon finally consented to help me to—to break it easy to you."

"I might have known it was your damned nonsense! You're getting more of a lunatic every day, Hiram—though you never had much sense, outside of the office."

"All right, so long as you don't blame her. I owe her too much—my new life—my new love!"

"Oh, if you're going to maunder!" said J. B., with a shrug of disgust; for talking about love had always seemed to him more or less indecent, if not immoral.

Again Hiram laughed joyously. It was as if he was armored in happiness, and nothing could wound him. He touched the old banker's shoulder affectionately and said:

"I must plead the excuse of youth."

"H-m! Youth!"

For a while they looked at each other in silence; Mr. Jenks smiling happily, Mr. Macraw with a lowering air of discontent,

as if the market was going against him. It was J. B. who spoke first.

"I say, Hiram, did it hurt?"

The astonished Mr. Jenks was miles away from his partner's thought.

"Hurt? What?"

"That hanky-panky," J. B. replied, sinking his voice to a confidential whisper.

For a while Hiram sat very still and made no reply. He looked curiously at the old banker, and then, confronted with the hard, keen eyes of J. B., he glanced away. By chance he found himself looking at the painted face in the oval frame of dingy gold.

"How was it done?" Mr. Macraw persisted. "Of course that Cree doctor—that brother-in-law man—showed me a lot of tricks of lights and apparatus, and talked like a book falling to pieces, but I'd like to hear about it from you. Didn't it hurt?"

"No," replied Hiram. He came around frankly to the old man. "It didn't hurt, but it was dangerous, I admit. Cree warned me. I might have gone under; but it was worth the risk. Oh, J. B., to be young again, strong—"

He reached out and picked up from the table the shallow brass bowl into which they had dropped their ashes as they smoked. He balanced it in the palm of his hand, and then slowly crushed it in his gripping fingers.

"Strong again!" He tossed the crumpled metal back on the table. "Put it with the other one, J. B.—if you happen to have kept it all these years."

And then Mr. Macraw remembered—an evening long ago, when the Oriental bowls had just been brought into the house; some one tinkling at the piano; and a flaunting Hiram, boasting of his strength, crushing in the mighty grip of his hand one of the metal bowls, and tossing it, just so, on the table. Years afterward J. B. had come upon it, battered and blackened, in a bedroom. Of this memory he did not speak, and no change came over his grim, discontented face.

"H-m! I suppose you want to be going somewhere, Hiram," he said at last. "Well, I've told what I had to tell. If that girl stood by you, you'll probably have to stand by her. I shan't try to interfere any more. You may know what you're doing. It's none of my business."

He seemed to be wrapping himself up in the caution born of wealth—in the pru-

dence of an old, old man. Hiram, as one who respected a mood he knew well, went away quietly, with only a gently spoken—

"Good night, J. B.!"

XV

WHEN Mr. Jenks left him, the banker sat for a while, smoking. He glanced at the brass bowl which had been crumpled in Hiram's grip. It called up for him a retrospective vision of a period in his life when he had other interests than that of the bank, and other duties than the inexorable duty of getting rich.

He had always thought that his wife was a little fool. He tried to recall a precise memory of her—how she dressed and talked; but the portrait had taken the place of the woman, and he could think of her only as that effigy in the oval frame, smiling at some mocking secret which he did not share with her.

It came upon him with the abruptness of a revelation, that he was alone and old. There had always been Hiram, with his fiery and familiar dominance—with his money genius and his flighty temper, both showing themselves in ways so unexpected that they kept his partner's attention on edge and gave excitement to the passing days; but Hiram had left his old friend—had run backward into a preposterous youthfulness in which J. B. had no part.

He was no longer the old Hiram with whom Macraw had everything in common. It was not only his body that was rejuvenated; there was an absurd mental youthfulness about him. Even in business hours his mind seemed to be flirting with the gayeties of life. His financial genius sometimes appeared to be dormant, and sometimes, of a sudden, it took flights so swift that his partner could not follow them. And yet J. B. knew it was Hiram's wild brain that had created their fortune, even as his own steadiness had preserved it.

Indeed, it was not altogether in business that he felt Hiram was lost to him. The business carried on of its own cumulative momentum. He realized gloomily that what he had lost was the friend who was instinctively a part of himself—through all the years a witness of his life—his contemporary. Aye, that was it—he had lost his contemporary friend, with whom he had traveled down the years.

Hiram had done more than hanky-panky his old carcass into seeming youthfulness.

He had in reality become young. He had escaped into another generation, one that J. B. neither knew nor understood. They were separated as generation is separated from generation, by a chasm which nothing can bridge. There was between them the eternal misunderstanding of old and young. Macraw was old and alone, perched on a huge heap of rotting wealth that he could not spend and had not the heart to give away.

After all, what had he got out of life? A handful of scarabs, and aching bones. And what was there still to be got? He could pile higher the heap of superfluous wealth, collect more of the shining gewgaws, while his bones stiffened and ached with rheumatism and his soul stiffened and ached with loneliness. He would give all that mountainous dunghill of money for health, youth—

But would he?

"Hanky-panky!" he muttered.

It must have been dangerous. Hiram had said that it was dangerous, and that he didn't know whether he would come out of it alive. Well, he wasn't like old Hiram. He hadn't wasted his health hunting pleasure. He hadn't made a fool of himself as Hiram had done; and he hadn't an enlarged spleen, either—not he! Old Hiram contended that his enlarged spleen was the cause of his bad temper, but, by Heaven, it was more likely that his nasty temper puffed up his spleen.

"What if it was dangerous, that hanky-panky? Everything is dangerous, when one is old and lonely. It was a cure for old age, if it succeeded. If it did not succeed, and anything happened to him—well, that, too, would be a cure for old age.

He tried to picture himself back at five and twenty, like Hiram. Damn the fellow, he had the look of a bull! And strong—that brass bowl had crumpled up like paper in his fingers. And the damned, smirking air of the fellow, peacocking like that!

"That's what I call it—peacocking!" declared J. B.

And not an ache in him! And a cigarette! Confound him, why should he have everything?

The old banker lifted himself out of the chair and went slowly toward the door. Before turning out the light, he looked around the room in his precautionary way, and his eyes chanced to meet the blue, mysterious eyes of the portrait. He paused, staring.

The secretive smile on the pretty painted mouth seemed to mock him and the envy in his heart.

He put the light out and left the room.

Once in the lighted hall, he straightened his old back and went rigidly up the stairs to his bedroom. Even in his bed the smile mocked him—a shadowy smile in the blackness of the room; and he could not sleep. He did not admit it to himself, but there burned in his heart a hot envy of Hiram and his youth, as he had gone swaggering off into the night, in evening clothes, his gloves dangling, his hat tilted on his thick-haired young head, the joy of living enveloping him like a radiant atmosphere.

J. B. told himself that it was absurd for him to envy that crazy youthfulness, which was, after all, merely put on by some hanky-panky. He was John Barker Macraw, wasn't he? He did not need to envy any one; but he began to think of a young John Barker Macraw, as young as Hiram—five and twenty. Why not?

There came to him a vision of youth which took away the envious anger he had been nursing against his old partner. He saw himself and Hiram still together, both young, both in the livery of evening, with buttonhole orchids, gloves dangling, hats insolently tilted—partners once more, contemporaries in life.

And then, in imagination, he saw them together in the bank. What couldn't they do, together, with their old, craft-steadied experience, their relentless knowledge of finance, acquired in fifty years of well trained greed; with the brains of seventy and the courage of five and twenty—what couldn't they do?

Old J. B. chuckled to himself there in his bed in the dark.

What couldn't they do? It would mean fifty more years of life in the Street. The reason why fortunes were not built higher was merely that there was a lack of continuity. Genius like Hiram's, caution like his, built up a fortune; then death stepped in, and the new generation took hold. In the blind, foolish way of youth it broke the old system, or it just sat down and hoarded. What was lost was the continuity—the unbroken driving power that first created and should indefinitely increase and perpetuate the fortune.

The chasm between the generations! Aye, that was what made it impossible to make the heap of wealth a mountain.

But here there would be no chasm between the generations. He and old Hiram, hidden in youth, as if they were masked, would carry on and carry on. They would drive relentlessly through another fifty years, and their only competitors in wealth-getting would be the mere boys, coming up—say, two generations of them—without experience such as theirs.

"By Heaven," thought J. B., "we could put 'em all in our pocket!"

This thought—this vision of a world all money, and he and Hiram perched atop of it—warmed his old heart and shone gloriously in his excited brain. Together—he and Hiram—as of old!

It was a long time before he fell asleep that night; and he had a bad dream. He awoke suddenly. It was still dark. He knew that he had had a dream, but he could not remember what it was about; and he slept again. Perhaps he slept only a few moments, for the dream came back immediately, as if it had been waiting persistently, just on the threshold of sleep. That is why it was so terrible.

He dreamed that Hiram wrote him a letter. It was there before his eyes, as if the shining letters were scrawled on the black of the night in old Hiram's careless and yet pretentious handwriting. The curious thing about it was that the words seemed to be alive and running across the dark so rapidly that he could hardly seize them.

Only phrases lingered in his waking memory—phrases heavy with mystery.

The scarab is not guilty.

This was the first sentence he made out. Then, flickering on the screen of night, came:

DEAR SIR:

Yours of the 24th just received. Brazil alone is guilty. One parrot as per invoice herewith. Pay on demand one thousand years of youth. Beg to inform you boat is sinking in sea of milk. Storm increasing. Help! Help!

And here the words in his dream ran together and began to circle around and around until they formed a fiery oval, through which a woman's face looked out—a face of flame and mockery.

J. B. awoke with a start. Of course it was ridiculous, absurd, fantastic, as dreams are, made up of fugitive fancies pieced together by a sleep-drugged brain; but it left an unpleasant impression, chiefly because the word "Brazil" ran through it.

Perhaps it was natural that he should dream of Brazil. There had been a year of financial peril, when it seemed that the house of Jenks & Macraw might go down in disaster, and of illness that nearly put him in the grave; and in sleep that bad recollection had come up out of the subconscious part of his mind, accompanied by all his thoughts about Hiram, and youth, and Heaven knew what not.

It was a nasty dream, and none the less disturbing because it was meaningless. He could not shake it off. Even when he had dressed and breakfasted, remnants of it clung to him. What was that damned parrot doing in his dream?

In spite of the dream, J. B. knew that the resolution he had taken the night before was firm as ever. For him what was once decided was decided. He had made up his mind precisely what he would do, and how he would do it.

To talk it over face to face with Hiram would give too many chances for jeers and gibes and ridicule. That was not what he wanted from his partner. He took down the telephone receiver and called up Hiram's apartment.

The answer was a sleepy growl, which turned into a quick, alert—

"That you, J. B.?"

"Yes, it's me, old Ponce de Leon! Aren't you awake yet? After eight o'clock. Suppose you were out all night, eh?"

"Not all of it, J. B."

"See here! I want you to get busy, Hiram, and tell that Dr. Cree man that I'm coming to see him to-day about an important matter. Make it for twelve o'clock. Get that?"

Hiram's reply was slow in coming.

"Yes, I get it—certainly. What do you want to see him about?"

"It's this, Hiram. I've been thinking it all over, what you've been telling me and what I've seen with my own eyes. I guess I ain't any more of a coward than you are, Hiram Jenks. If it's dangerous, then it's dangerous; but I'm going to have a shot at it. My mind is made up, and you know what that means. I'm going to try it. You and I've been friends too long, and I've just about lost you since you got back into your second childhood—and cigarettes! So I think I'll go back where you are, and we'll make a new start together. Eh, Hiram—get that?"

"Yes."

"You don't seem to be eaten up with joy. Want to keep it to yourself?"

"No, J. B. No. I was thinking. It is all so unexpected."

"Well, now you know it. I've got it out. What's so surprising in it? You didn't use to be the dog in the manger kind."

"Then you really mean it? And you want to see Dr. Cree?"

"Twelve o'clock. You make that appointment for me? Get it? Awake now? I thought this would wake you up. Eh, Hiram?"

"All right! Of course I'll do it. Twelve o'clock."

Hiram's voice came back steadily, but J. B. read in it a sort of bewilderment which made him chuckle as he said good-by and hung up the instrument. He had given Hiram Jenks a facer!

Mr. Macraw had ample time to do what had to be done before the appointment. At nine o'clock he called upon his private physician. He asked for an examination—not a mere tap-tapping and leg-pulling. It was to be a thorough examination. He was to be meticulously examined, as if science, with lighted candle in its hand, crept through him and peered at every nook and cranny of his old body.

For this a radio-photographic expert took him in hand. He lay on his face, with the plates clapped on his back; he lay on his back, with the plates on the lean front of him. When the radio-photographs were ready, the physicians studied them and wagged their heads.

It was a long and complex examination that followed, for the doctors tested him as if he was a suspiciously bad coin. Their verdict cheered his old heart—the organs were all right, and, indeed, bar that rheumatoidal arthritis, which was in a good way, there was very little the matter with him.

Except old age, eh? As he got back into his clothes, Mr. Macraw told himself that he thought he knew a remedy for that; and it was a cheerful old man who swung out into the street. It was getting on for the hour of his appointment, and as he was not far from Dr. Cree's sanatorium he decided to walk. He liked to walk, in spite of his stiffening legs; it was a habit he had kept.

He tramped up Madison Avenue, a rigid old man, formidably respectable. It would have been a bold beggar who asked alms

from so much respectability. Mr. Macraw, with his hard shell of financial dignity, was decidedly a man to be let alone. Passers-by made way for him, as little ships steer clear of some battered cruiser thrashing down the bay. It had always been like that.

And yet this morning two extraordinary things happened to him. They were unprecedented, and that was bad enough for one who did not like unusual things to happen. In addition, they were disturbing in themselves—ridiculous and sinister, like his dream.

A woman was coming down the steps of a tall, brown house. She was a mere casual, insignificant woman, fairly young, but certainly not worth looking at, and Mr. Macraw, of course, did not look at her. Suddenly, as he passed, she broke out into mocking laughter. He turned and glared at her, but, without a glance at him, she sauntered away down the avenue, still laughing.

"Now what's that fool laughing at?"

Perplexed, angry, J. B. walked on.

Then the second thing happened. There was no one near him, but something brushed against his leg. His old nerves gave a jump, and he stopped and looked down. A red dog, friendly and confident, was rubbing itself against his leg, wagging its tail and turning up soft, adoring eyes.

It was amazing. In all his life no dog had ever spoken to J. B. before; but this red dog was expressing its ridiculous love for him in every possible canine way.

"Get out!" said Mr. Macraw.

He loathed dogs. He suspected them of evil designs on his bones.

The red dog capered at his side, ran a little ahead of him, and came back, barking cheerily, as if he knew that he and J. B. were loving pups of the same litter.

"Idiot! I told you to go away. Get out!"

Trotting at his side, rubbing against his legs, the red dog accompanied the austere old man, closer than a brother. When J. B., eying the brute askance, turned into the street of the sanatorium, the animal still went with him, resolutely friendly, not to be discouraged by threats.

Together they came to Dr. Cree's house. It was when Mr. Macraw stopped at that house, and no other, that the red dog darted away and fled down the street with a long, mournful howl.

"Now what's that fool dog howling about?"

He rang the bell savagely.

XVI

WHEN J. B. was shown into the reception room of Dr. Cree's sanatorium, he thought at first that it was empty; but Ada, dressed in the cold, gray garb of the professional nurse, rose quickly from the big chair which had hidden her, and came to meet him.

Seen there in the garish room, with its gleaming furniture, its glaring rugs and pictures, its air of being as new and lavish as a stage set, she looked even graver and more out of place than usual. J. B. had always thought of her, the few times he had seen her, as a wet blanket sort of woman. He had noticed nothing remarkable about her, except that she never seemed to let herself go. She gave the impression, he thought, of always holding herself in hand. It was as if behind the sweet, grave face, deep within the quiet eyes, something were happening—something inevitable, which in due time would come to light, without haste and without surprise.

She did not ask the visitor to sit down. She did not offer to shake hands. She stood in front of him, a tall, gray figure, silent and vague as a premonition.

"How d'ye do, Mrs. Cree?"

J. B. thought she might as well understand that her silly secret was known to him.

"You know that?"

"Why shouldn't I? There are no secrets between me and Hiram. If he marries your sister, there won't be much about the family that I don't know, sooner or later. Why not? I don't believe in secrets—outside of business. Where's the doctor? It's just twelve o'clock."

"Yes," Ada repeated slowly, "twelve o'clock. The clock has struck. It was exactly twelve when you came under this roof—I shall remember."

"Well, Dr. Cree don't seem to remember. I had an appointment. Where is he?"

"He has been with a patient, but he is coming. I hear him. And now," she added to herself, "it is too late. I can't say what I wanted to say; but perhaps it is just as well. He must say it."

Even as she spoke, the doctor strode in. The mere presence of this handsome fellow, portly and impressive, radiating his "psy-

chomoral" charm, seemed to change the very atmosphere of the room. Even the shadowy woman in the gray uniform caught and reflected a little of his glowing vitality.

Hiram Jenks, hat in hand, as if he had just come in from the street, followed the doctor across the threshold. He was an angry-looking, sulky-eyed Hiram. His only greeting was a short "Hello, J. B.!" as he threw himself down on the big leather couch and thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

Dr. Cree's welcome of the old financier was spacious and all-embracing. It made up for Ada's strangeness and for the abrupt sulkiness of Hiram Jenks.

"Well, that's said, and I'm much obliged to you," J. B. remarked calmly, looking first at the doctor and then at Hiram with an air of grim satisfaction. "I suppose Mr. Jenks has told you all about it. I've made up my mind. I'm going to take that hank—I mean that scientific treatment for old age. Hiram and I are both going to go back to the days of our youth and play together; and by Heaven," he went on, his harsh voice gathering strength, "the game we play will make the little money-boys of this round world sit up and take notice! Eh, Hiram—they'll have to watch our smoke, eh?"

Mr. Jenks had been trying to get a word in. At last he exploded:

"What the devil do you want to be young for? You were born a grouchy old man to begin with, and you've always been one. You never were young in your life, J. B.!"

"Perhaps that's the reason I'm going to be young, Hiram. I want my turn; but not for any of your lunatic reasons. I'm a sensible man."

"Damn it!" Hiram shouted.

He bounced to his feet, and the Jenks temper sputtered through his teeth as he tried to find words big enough for it.

"Oh, Mr. Jenks!" Dr. Cree put in soothingly. "Really now—you must excuse him, Ada—that is not the way to take Mr. Macraw's extremely flattering suggestion. I am flattered—why shouldn't I admit it? It is a compliment not only to me, for which I am grateful, but to science. But there are difficulties; and, speaking for myself and for science, I must make them very clear, Mr. Macraw. Sit down, sir. Why are we standing? Your chair by the table, Mr. Macraw. Here, Ada—you don't mind,

Mr. Jenks—there is room for the three of us on the couch. That's better! Yes, M. Macraw, there are difficulties."

The doctor gesticulated with his talkative hands as if he were building up a mountain range.

From his seat by the table, where the scattered scarabs lay, J. B. faced the long, deep couch with its three occupants, Dr. Cree between Ada and the sputtering Hiram.

"Well, maybe there are difficulties, as you call 'em; but you did it for Hiram"—he nodded toward his partner—"and I guess I am good for anything he could get away with, eh?"

"What about your old stomach," Mr. Jenks barked; "and that rheumatoid arthritis you're always boasting about?"

"I intend to get rid of 'em, Hiram, just as you got rid of that spleen of yours—but not the bad temper that went with it! I wish he'd hanky-pankied that out of you. You're merely burning up with jealousy. You don't want to let me in on it. No, you're dog-in-the-mangering again, Hiram; but I'm not blaming you. You must feel as if you had a mortgage on the United States, of America—and Canada. We'll share it, Hiram, as we have shared everything else!"

"You might have to leave it all, J. B.—power and wealth, scarabs and memories—"

"It's my risk."

Mr. Macraw was calm and determined. His corrosive voice carried conviction. Leaning forward toward them, he pictured his vision of limitless wealth—of himself and Hiram, both young in years, both old in the savage wisdom of the Street, starting out to capture, in another fifty years, the strategic fortresses of world wealth and world power.

It was not for his partner's benefit that he elaborated this dream of conquest. He counted upon Hiram's immediate comprehension of the magnificent possibility, because financier always understands financier, since they are always thinking of the same thing—money. He looked at his partner, glowering there on the couch, as he talked, but the dazzling picture he drew was, in reality, for Dr. Ira Cree.

The doctor's reluctance to do for him what he had done for Hiram Jenks surprised J. B., but he had never yet found the man he could not buy if he paid enough, and he would pay the price. Millions and

billions rolled thunderously through his talk; and in the great black eyes of the scientist—in his mobile, eager face—he seemed to see a reflection of the greed and glory of his dream.

"It won't do, Hiram, to let any one else in on this," he went on argumentatively. "What would youth be worth to us, if every fellow could have it? All the old crocks of the Street crawling out of their beds, young as ever they were, to get their knives into us! No! The value of this discovery of yours, Dr. Cree, is in keeping it quiet—just for me and Mr. Jenks. You can't work it for anybody else. Just me and Mr. Jenks, d'ye see? We'll corner the thing. If you don't get that scientific fame you were talking about, you'll get millions, millions, millions!"

The words rolled off the old banker's tongue like liquid gold.

"Your fame can wait. Time enough for that. Some day, doctor, the world will wonder at us all, like miracles; and you'll get your scientific fame all right, eh?"

The professional look had fallen away from the big, glittering man of science. His black eyes gleamed with a new and covetous light. He listened to J. B.'s money rhapsody as a child listens to a ghost story, with awe and a sort of pleasurable terror. The ambitions of scientific conquest—the lust of scientific fame—died out in the flame of this new vision of monstrous wealth.

How clearly he saw it! All the vague ancestors who made up his vehement and complex personality seemed to be shouting aloud within him:

"Wealth! Wealth!"

His swift imagination showed him a new world to conquer; and J. B. understood.

"Well, doctor, now you begin to see it, don't you?"

Hiram Jenks had been listening to his partner with repressed anger, sulky and dangerous.

"If you've finished, J. B., I've something—"

"Hush!" said Ada. "Oh, hush!"

Half turning, she laid her hand on Dr. Cree's arm.

"Ira," she whispered softly. At the sound of her low, urgent appeal, he started as one who comes too quickly out of a pleasant dream. "Tell him, Ira, that it is impossible."

(To be continued in the February number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

The Fighting Blood of King Jordan

AND THE DRAMATIC ENDING OF HIS CAMPAIGN FOR THE
HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

By William Slavens McNutt

I FIRST met King Jordan out in Seattle. I had been around in the sticks for several months, trying to dig up a heavyweight to lick the champ, and had finally got hold of a slant-headed timber wrastler down in Portland who looked pretty good to me.

He was a big, rangy logger by the name of Whitey Larsen. He didn't savvy much about the game, but he had a lot of natural ability. He could take an awful slam on the chin without batting an eye, and his midriff was corrugated armor plate. You couldn't sink an ax into that washboard front of his. He had a corset of muscles around his waist that looked like a bouquet of coal heavers' fists.

I tested him out in the gym for a while, and decided that he'd be able to learn in time. I fought him here and there, up and down the coast, in a lot of four-round stuff, and finally got him a bout up in Seattle with a local bird by the name of One Punch Doyle. This One Punch Doyle was pretty good, as they rate them out in the sticks. I figured that if my boy was far enough along to beat him, I'd take Whitey to the East and start him in with some of the better-class preliminary boys around New York and Boston.

When we got to Seattle, Portus Brown, a sporting editor there, who's an old pal of mine, came to the hotel to see me, and brought King Jordan with him.

"Jordan's an Alaskan," Portus said, after he introduced us. "He was born in the Yukon in the early days, and has spent most of his life battling around up there, prospecting and one thing and another.

He's got a great reputation in that country as a fighter."

This young Jordan was a sizable, well dressed young fellow with nice manners. He blushed like a school kid.

"I wish you'd quit talking about that, Portus," he said. "You make me feel like a fool!" Then he turned to me. "That's all a lot of rot, what Portus says about me. I'm not a fighter at all. I never even saw a real fight—I mean one in a ring, between professionals."

"That gives me a laugh!" Portus declared. "Jordan got his reputation as a fighter when he wiped up eight big Bohunks that was working for him on a claim up in the Iditarod country. They all went for him at once with shovels and picks. Jordan did his work with a pick handle, his fists, and his feet. He got pretty badly smashed up, but when it was all over he was the only one of the lot able to make the eight-mile trip to the nearest camp, to get a doctor."

"Oh, well, that sort of fighting's different from fighting in a ring," Jordan allowed. "I'm anxious to see a real fight."

"I'm bringing him down to see your boy fight One Punch Doyle to-morrow night," Portus said. "I imagine it will be pretty weak tea for a man who has fought for his life against eight big bruisers with shovels and picks!"

"Oh, that was just rough and tumble work," Jordan observed. "I suppose a real professional fighter could have licked the whole crowd of us with his bare hands."

"Well," I said, "there's a lot of difference between a professional and an ama-

teur. You'd better come down to the show to-morrow night, and tell me what you think of it."

II

On the night of the fight me and my boy was sitting in the dressing room while the preliminaries was on, and Portus Brown come in with this fellow King Jordan. Right away Jordan began asking Whitey a lot of questions about the game. You could see that he thought Whitey was a great guy.

While we were sitting there talking, Denny Morgan, who was putting on the show, come in with bad news. One Punch Doyle had took a taxicab to come down to the joint where they was putting on the bout. The taxicab had got sassy with a street car, and One Punch come out of the argument with a busted leg.

"Tough luck, Hammond!" Morgan said to me. "I don't know anybody I could put on in Doyle's place who'd give your boy any kind of a battle. The heavyweight guys around here are a terrible set of bums. The worst of it is that they've all been on at one time or another, and the fans are wise to them. If I had some unknown that I could stick on with your boy, I might get away with it."

I was pretty sore. Whitey was to get five hundred for his end that night, if he won, and I was figuring on that dough for expenses East.

"You ought to be able to dig up some kind of a punching bag, Morgan," I said. "You got a perfectly good alibi with the fans. Tain't your fault that Doyle busted his leg. Put somebody on, and give us a chance to get this dough."

Morgan was cold on that.

"Why don't you put on King Jordan here?" Portus Brown suggested. "He ought to get by well enough, if this boy of yours will pull his punches a little."

Well, naturally, I'm for that. I'm for anything that will give us a chance to get the dough.

"Sure!" I agreed. "That's fine. Go ahead, Mr. Jordan! You just get in there and do your best, and my boy will go easy with you. He won't hurt you."

"Oh, no! I couldn't do that," Jordan said. "I'm not a fighter. I wouldn't know what to do in a ring with a pair of gloves on my hands."

"Go on! Give it a try," Portus told

him. "It's only four rounds. Go ahead—just for a joke. See what you can do."

"Why, I'd just as soon, only I'm afraid of making a fool of myself. I don't know anything about professional fighting. This fellow'll probably make me look silly. I don't mind, but these people out here paid their money to see a fight, and if I go in there and can't make good, why, it's just like cheating them out of their money."

"Take a shot at it, Jordan," the sporting editor advised. He turns to Morgan. "You can make it good," he says to him.

"Go out and tell them the truth, or something close to it. That'll be a novelty, to begin with. Tell them that Doyle had his leg broken, and that just at the last minute a fellow from Alaska—you can call him the champion heavyweight of the Yukon, or the Polar Bear Kid, or any old thing—tell them this fellow offered to go on in Doyle's place. Tell them you don't know if he's any good or not, but he's the best you got, and may show them something."

"Oh, say, I don't like to do this!" Jordan objected. "It seems kind of foolish, somehow."

"Don't worry, Jordan," I said. "My boy won't hurt you. If he does, I'll slap his face for him when he comes off!"

This fellow Jordan looked at me and began to smile. Then he busted right out laughing.

"I'm not afraid of his hurting me, Mr. Hammond," he said. "Did you think that was worrying me?"

"Well," I said, "I didn't mean that you was scared of him, or anything like that, but—"

"I don't mind taking a licking," Jordan explained. "I'm just afraid I won't be able to do well enough to give these people a run for their money."

"Say, Mr. Jordan," I said to him, "it's plain to see you don't know much about this game. A fight fan gets a run for his money just about as often as a bald-headed man gets his hair back. Most of these fighters are close relatives," I said. "They're all members of the Double Cross family, and when they get into the ring together it's old home week. They got a union," I says to him. "Any guy that hits hard enough to put a dent in a pound of soft butter is a dirty scab. They ain't fighters," I says to him. "They're actors. A couple of them get into the ring together and hug each other, and pretty soon one of

them says to the other: 'Now you scowl, kid, and then hit me. Hit me on the chin, and I'll flop. I'll stay down about eight seconds, and then I'll hang on for the rest of the round. The next round I'll come back strong and belt you one in the teeth, and you take a count. Then you get up and hang on for the rest of that round, and then we'll both be all wore out.' That's the kind of a run fight fans get for their money, about ninety-nine times out of a hundred. They don't see a fight—they see an act. You go on there and do your best, and those guys out there'll be so tickled they'll go home and kiss their own wives!"

"Well, I don't mind," Jordan said. "I don't know anything about this kind of fighting, but I'll go on and do my best."

III

"KING JORDAN, the Man from the Far North," Morgan announced him.

The crowd went cuckoo. They were all for the unknown.

I'll say I got a surprise when the referee crawled into the ring, and Jordan stepped out of his bath robe. I never in my life saw anything as beautifully built, aside from them Greek statues they got in museums. He was one of these long-muscled, round-built boys that don't make much of a showing in clothes. He had long, clean legs with small knees and ankles. His calves weren't bunchy, but the way the tendons rippled under that white skin of his, when he stepped around, would have done your heart good to see.

His body was smooth, and as round as a keg. His shoulders were sloping, and at the first look you'd say they weren't very broad. They didn't show up like these high, square shoulders; but they certainly were built for business. Did you ever notice the shoulders on a lion? You don't notice them so much in comparison with his body, unless you're interested in such things and take a second look. They're kind of flat-built, you know, and snug; but it's common knowledge what a lion can do with them if he wants to sock a blow home.

Jordan was as nervous as a school kid with a piece to speak. After I got a flash at him in his fighting togs, that was the only thing I was worried about. You never can tell what a guy's going to do when he's nervous. Some men can fight like a wild cat if they're nervous, while others just get paralyzed.

The gong rang, and I started praying for Jordan to make some kind of a showing that would give us a chance to get away with the dough without being liable for grand larceny.

That was one prayer I wasted. Jordan came out of his corner as if a stick of dynamite had gone off under his stool, and he came fighting. He was that rare thing that every man who ever managed fighters dreams about finding some time—a natural hitter. He wasn't a swinger; he just hit naturally from any angle, and he hit straight. How he could sock!

He rushed my boy against the ropes, and was slamming him so fast that Whitey must have thought somebody had upset a train-load of boxing gloves on him. Whitey ducked and got clear for just a second, but this fellow Jordan was around and on top of him again like a hungry cat after a loose mouse.

When Jordan whirled around, I could see his eyes, and I said to myself right there:

"Good-by, Whitey!"

Any man who's got the stuff in him to be better than the best at any game has got something inside of him that can take fire at the proper instant—something that can flare up with all the fury and power of a dynamite explosion and keep right on blazing at top heat until the game is won. Whatever it is, if a man's got it, it shows in his eyes; and Jordan had it. He had it, and my boy Whitey knew he had it.

Whitey was scared. It's a funny thing, but when a man's scared he's naturally bound to do the thing that leaves him wide open for the very thing that he's afraid of. There's another funny thing about fear—when a man's just a little bit scared that something's going to hit him, he'll guard his face and head; but if the real original fear gets into his heart, he'll take care of the pit of his stomach every time.

From the look of Whitey, I guess the granddaddy of all the fears that ever herded the gooseflesh up and down a man's back had pitched his camp for the evening in my boy's heart. Whitey crouched down and dropped his guard over his abdomen.

As he crouched, Jordan let one go to the jaw. It was a straight right, as true as a rifle bullet. When it landed, it sounded like a mule's hind foot banging on a barn door. There was so much speed and power in that right that it lifted Whitey clean off

his feet. He fell backward in a kind of curve, just as if he was doing a back dive off of a springboard, and lit on top of his head. He was cold for ten minutes.

He hadn't hit the canvas when I was on my way through the ropes with just one idea in my noodle. I wanted King Jordan's name on a contract. I was as certain that, barring accidents, I was looking at a future world's champion, as I am that the world didn't come to an end last year.

It was a job getting him through the crowd and out to the dressing room. Those fans were howling crazy about Jordan, and every one of them, from the gallery to the ringside, tried to pile down into the aisle and shake his hand or slap his back.

I finally got him to his dressing room, and slammed and locked the door before any one else could get in. He acted like a man coming out from under ether.

"Why, why—what—what happened?" he asked me.

"What happened?" I said. "Nothing at all, except that you knocked my boy into the middle of a sleep that many a millionaire with insomnia would pay real money for!"

He acted as if he thought he'd done something wrong.

"I was just trying to make it interesting for all those folks that come to see the show."

"Don't worry," I told him. "For once in their lives they got their money's worth!"

He was still bewildered.

"But how did I happen to knock him out? I thought Mr. Larsen was a professional fighter."

"So did I," I agreed.

Then I put the proposition to him—to sign up with me and go after the world's championship. At first he just laughed at the idea.

"Do you know what a championship's worth?" I asked him. "Over a million dollars! Now you're green at this game, and you probably don't realize what being the king of the heavyweights means. If you could work like hell up in Alaska for, say, two or three years, and know all the while that at the end of that time you'd be the owner of a mine that you could sell for a million dollars, you'd think pretty well of the idea, wouldn't you? Sure! Well, this proposition I'm making you is just as good. I know fighters and the fight game. I know that if you're managed right, you can be

champion of the world in two or three years, and probably sooner. If you have any doubts about whether I'm capable of managing you properly, ask your friend, Portus Brown, about me."

It took me a week to convince him, but he finally signed up with me. I started East with him feeling like a man who's just been left a fortune by some old relative he didn't know existed.

IV

I PUT King Jordan over the jumps in a gymnasium in Chicago for about six weeks, and he came ahead like a gale of wind. Then I matched him with a third-rater up in Milwaukee, and sat back satisfied that the morning after that fight he'd be on his way to national notoriety in the boxing game.

Well, it's differences of opinion that make horse racing possible, and I suppose surprises, good and bad, are what make life interesting. If none of our plans that we were sure of ever went wrong, and none of them that we didn't think much of ever turned out to be better than we expected, things would be pretty monotonous.

Jordan went into the ring up there with that poor old tramp, and, instead of leaping into fame overnight, he boxed fifteen rounds that were so tame and slow that an old ladies' knitting society could have sat at the ringside and watched the whole show without ever losing a stitch. He got the decision over this poor old bum, all right. I could have done that myself; but he didn't fight. There was no flash to him.

I simply could not get him under way. Instead of the publicity I expected, the next day's papers gave us a bare mention. Some of them said that King Jordan was a likely-looking boy, but that he seemed to have no fighting spirit.

Can you imagine that? Here I am with a guy that's got everything physical that any champion ought to have, and, in addition to that, enough fighting fury in him somewhere to make a pink-eyed white rabbit jump down a bulldog's throat and eat his way out just for exercise before breakfast! I knew he had it—I'd seen him show it; and here he goes on in his first professional battle, and shows about as much pep as a man on his way to pay a dentist's bill!

I took him East, then, and got him a few fights around New York and Boston. He

won them all, and got pretty good notices. The sporting writers all said that I had a good boy, and that he rated well up along with half a dozen contenders for the title. We were making fairly good money, and most of my friends considered me lucky to have a man as promising as King Jordan; and all the time I was wild!

Everybody else thought I had just a pretty good boy that had an outside chance for the championship; but I knew that I had one of the greatest fighting men that the world had ever seen, if I could just do something to make the fighting stuff that was in him take fire and blaze into white heat at the proper time.

I finally got him a fight in the Garden with Boston Bill Kerrigan, who was rated a shade the best of all the boys that were battling for a chance to knock the champ out from underneath his crown.

The night of the fight, I sat in the dressing room with Jordan, and put on a sob act that would have made Margaret Anglin, at her weepiest, sound like a waitress calling for coffee and sinkers. I begged and pleaded and swore and threatened. I praised him and cursed him. I talked loud and talked soft. I appealed to his sense of honor, his love of money, his pride, his sense of gratitude. I said everything I could think of that might possibly wake the man up and make him fight the way he was capable of fighting.

"Jordan," I said to him at the finish, just before we start for the ring, "I've brought you along up a flight of stairs that leads straight to a million dollars in money and as much fame as there is in being President of the United States. You're just two steps away from the top now. This fellow Kerrigan is one step, and the champ himself is the next. If you want to, you can take both of those steps just as easy as I can walk up two steps on an ordinary staircase. If you can fight to-night the way you fought out there in Seattle, the first time I saw you, this Boston Bill Kerrigan won't last a round with you. If you can fight that same way the night you meet the champ, I'll bet ten to one he can't last five rounds. You've got to set a match to yourself and explode. The difference between you when you're on fire, as you were that night out in Seattle, and the way you've been going since, is just the difference between a fairly good horse and Man-o'-War—the difference between a good hitter and

Babe Ruth; and that same difference is the difference between a few thousand dollars and a million. Man alive, I'm telling you the truth! You've got a million dollars in your hand right now. All in the world you've got to do is to grip tight enough, and it's yours. You can do it. For the love of Mike, don't let it slip!"

"I'll do the best I can, Hammond," he promised.

"You've got to do a thousand times better than that!" I told him. "This Boston Bill Kerrigan is going to do the best he can, too, and his best is about as good as yours; but you've got the stuff in you to blaze up and do so much better than your best that nobody can take what you hand out. That's what you've got to do to-night!"

"I'll give him all I've got," he said, as he started for the ring.

V

I LOST at least five years of my life there that night. I never sat through such a heartbreaking sixty minutes since I began to sit up in my cradle and say "Goo, goo!" Fifteen rounds to a draw the thing went. The sporting writers couldn't understand why I wasn't tickled that my boy did so well; and me setting there all the while, knowing that if I could just do something to touch off the stuff that was in that kid, he'd knock this Boston Bill Kerrigan inside out in half a round!

Jordan fought a pretty good fight—the kind of a fight that was just made to order for the champ. I knew that if he ever got into the ring with a title holder, and fought that kind of a battle, he was as sure a loser as the people that bet on the Kaiser's eating his Christmas dinner in Paris in 1914.

"Did I fight the way you wanted me to?" he asked me, as soon as the judges awarded the decision.

I didn't have the heart to argue with him.

"Let it go," I said. "You said you'd do your best, and that's just about what you did. I'll talk to you later."

I kept away from him for a couple of days after that. He had me beat.

I thought it all over, and I finally figured that the best thing to do was to get him a match with the champ, let him take the licking that was coming to him and the loser's end, and then kiss him good-by and look for some other proposition that had the promise of real dough in it.

Then I got the same kind of a shock that I'd had that night out in Seattle, when Jordan went wild and knocked my boy, Whitey Larsen, into a job at day's wages.

I'd been to a roof show uptown, and was coming down Eighth Avenue, just below Columbus Circle, when I saw King just ahead of me with a girl on his arm. There was a bunch of fellows standing on the street in front of a jazz parlor, and one of them made some crack at the girl as she and King went by.

Jordan turned around and came back to where the gang was standing. I don't know what there was about it—the way he moved, or something—but just watching him made the cold shivers run up and down my back. There was something about him that reminded me of a cat slipping up on a bird and just about ready to jump.

I got into a scrape with a Mexican once, down in Juarez, and all of a sudden he pulled a knife on me with a blade about a foot long. I remember the way I felt when I saw the blade of that knife in the light from the window of a saloon we were standing in front of. I felt that same way watching King Jordan walk back toward that gang. He walked slowly and apparently quite naturally, but there was something about the way he moved that made you think of the undertaker.

"Which one of you fellows said that?" he asked.

He spoke just as if he was asking for a match, but there was the same thing in his voice that there was in the way he moved—something that made you get ready to go away from there without thinking why.

Nobody answered him for a minute. Then one of the gang said:

"Suppose I tell you we all said it?"

"That suits me," Jordan replied, and smashed the fellow full in the face.

The guy dropped as if he'd been beamed with a blackjack, and the real fun began. I don't know how many there were in that gang in the beginning, but I know that five minutes later there were six of them scattered around on the street and the sidewalk, while me and two cops were having a busy evening trying to hold Jordan and keep him from committing murder. Luckily for him, I knew the two cops, or they might have killed him with their clubs.

You know sometimes a man of just ordinary strength will go crazy and get so husky all of a sudden that it takes five or

six men to hold him, where if he was sane any one of them could do the job. That was the way with Jordan, only of course he was extraordinarily strong, even when he was normal. That thing in him that I had seen afire up in Seattle was burning again, and he was just as easy to hold as a couple of full-grown hungry lions with dinner in sight.

"They insulted her!" he kept shouting, as he thrashed around with all of us hanging to him. "I'll kill them for that!"

And there I was with my legs and arms wrapped around him, saying to myself:

"If I could make him go like this in the ring! If I could get him a match with the champ, and find some way to be sure that he'd go as he did to-night while he was mad!"

When Jordan had begun to calm down a little, he acted just like a man coming out of a trance.

"Oh, hello!" he says to me, as if I had just shown up; and there I'd been hanging on to him like a Scotchman to a dime for five minutes. "Those fellows insulted her," he said.

"Insulted who?" I asked him.

"Why, Miss Raymond," he said.

Then he seemed to come to a little more, and looked around. He saw the girl standing on the curb about half a block away, and he walked off and left me and the two cops to pick ourselves up. He just gave himself a shake, and there were the three of us sitting on the pavement, wondering how an earthquake happened to strike New York.

The cops jumped up and started for him, but I called them off.

"He won't run away," I told them. "I'll answer for him. Just let him alone, and he'll be all right."

I followed him on down the street, and he introduced me to the girl. She was a nice-looking kid, about twenty years old, scared, of course, and crying a little. Jordan was all broken up.

"I must take Miss Raymond home, Hammond," he said. "Will I have to go to the station house about this thing?"

"I'm afraid you will, King," I told him. "Maybe the bulls will let me off, though. If they will, I'll take Miss Raymond home, and you wait for me at the station."

"Do that," Jordan begged. "Poor little girl! What a rotten thing to have to see! It's a shame! I'll bet that bunch of hood-

lums will be older before they insult another girl on the street like that!"

VI

I GOT a taxi and took Miss Raymond to her home, up on One Hundred and Eighteenth Street, just off Broadway. I learned a lot on the way. She worked in a broker's office down town, and she thought the sun wouldn't dare come up in the morning if King Jordan told it not to.

The only thing about him she didn't like was his profession. She was a wholesome, old-fashioned sort of a kid from a little town up the State, and she was certain that King Jordan was the only man in all history who had enough character to be a professional fighter and still not be a dirty scoundrel.

After I left her at her home, I hustled back to the station and got Jordan's angle on the thing.

"We're going to be married as soon as I can get started in some good business," he told me. "She hates this fighting game. I can't blame her. I don't mind it for myself, but I'd hate to have my wife meeting the sort of people a fighter has to deal with."

I tried to stir him up with the idea of copping the championship and the dough that goes with it, so that he could make things fine for her; but he didn't seem to warm up.

"I owe you something, Hammond," he said. "If you'll get me a match with the champ right away, I'll go through with it for your sake. If I win the title, I'll stay in the game long enough to clean up some of the easy money, and make it worth your while to have handled me. Miss Raymond and I won't get married until I quit the ring, and I—I don't want to wait any longer than I have to."

That was a fine spirit for him to have when he got into the ring with the champ! "I hope I get licked, so that I can quit the game right away and get married"—that would be about the thought in his mind when he fought. Nothing in that for me but my share of the loser's end of the purse; and I was shooting for bigger stakes.

Then I got the great idea. After it came to me, I didn't close my eyes until I had Jordan signed with the champ. I had to give away everything but my right eye to get the match, but I didn't kick much, because I wasn't interested in the loser's end of the purse. I knew that if the scheme I

had in mind worked, Jordan would cop the championship; so I was willing to agree to any terms to get the fight.

I didn't make a move until about a week before the battle was due to come off. Then I went to see Miss Raymond.

"This man of yours has got a million dollars in his hand," I told her. "It's up to you whether he keeps it or throws it away. Now that's a big responsibility. If he don't get this dough that goes with the championship, the chances are that he'll have to work pretty hard all his life, and that he'll never get enough money to be more than just comfortable. It's up to you. If you'll do your part, and do it right, Jordan will win the championship and make a million dollars. If you fall down on me, he'll take a licking, and then he'll be done. He'll have to go back to Alaska and start in a small way up there, or else begin at the bottom in some business around here. That means all the difference to him between being one *in* a hundred and ten millions, or just one *of* a hundred and ten millions."

"I'll do anything in the world to help him," the girl said. "As far as I'm concerned, I don't like the idea of his being a prize fighter—even a champion. Most men like that have so many friends and admirers, and so much is written about them in the newspapers, that their heads are turned. I don't think King would be spoiled, but the thought of it frightens me a little. I feel as if I might not mean as much to him if he had all the glory and wealth that goes with the championship. All the same, if there is anything I can do to help him to win it, I'll do it, and then I'll pray that it won't hurt him—that it won't make any difference between us. What must I do?"

"To-morrow, or the next day, you tell Jordan that you'd like to go over to the champ's training quarters and watch him work," I explained. "Tell him when I'm around. I'll butt in and offer to take you over. Jordan may kick a little, but you insist on going. It's perfectly all right. The champ is training in public and charging fifty cents a head for admission. Lots of women go there every afternoon. While we're there, I'll introduce you to the champ. You tell Jordan that you met him, and let it rest at that. Then, on the night of the fight, just before King leaves his quarters to get dressed for the ring, you call him on the phone and tell him that the champ insulted you."

"Oh, I couldn't do that, Mr. Hammond!" she said. "I couldn't lie to King!"

"Wait a minute," I said. "This is a million-dollar lie, and it can't hurt anybody but the man Jordan's going to fight. All you've got to do is to call Jordan up and tell him that the champ phoned to you, asking you to meet him after the fight, and then say that he insulted you. You won't have to go into details. Just say that he insulted you, and that will be enough. If you'll do that, Jordan will go in there and knock him cold in a few minutes, and get the championship and all that goes with it. If you don't, he'll take a terrible beating. He'll never again have the chance to make real big money."

She sat quiet for a long time, thinking about it. Finally she took a deep breath, and the tears came into her eyes.

"I'll do it," she promised me. "I don't dare not to. I'll do it for King's sake, Mr. Hammond!"

She began to cry then.

"I can't help it," she sobbed. "I suppose I'm mean and selfish, but I hope he doesn't win this fight. I'll do anything to help him win, but I hope he doesn't. I can't help it!"

I went away from there feeling kind of mixed in my mind. In one way I felt as if I'd just cashed a great big bet on a hundred-to-one shot; and then again I felt as if I'd robbed a blind man of his pennies and had him pinched for begging.

A clean, honest, wholesome kid like that Miss Raymond can come closer to making a hard-boiled old rounder like me feel sinful, and sorry for it, than all the preachers that ever pounded a pulpit. I was sure that I was doing the best thing for everybody concerned; but at the same time I had a sneaking suspicion that if I got what was coming to me, the coroner's jury would bring in a verdict of "died from poison because he had to stay in the same room with himself."

VII

ON the night of the fight I was as nervous as a mouse at a cat show.

About ten minutes before we were ready to start for the Garden, the phone rang, and King answered it. I knew it was Miss Raymond keeping her promise, and I watched him the way a fellow with his last dollar hanging on a quarter-point change in a live-stock watches the ticker.

"Hello!" he said, and then, real pleased: "Oh, hello, Elsie!"

Then, while he listened, I saw his back sort of stiffen and arch a little, and the knuckles on the hand that was holding the receiver stood out big and white from the way he gripped the thing. Right away I got that same uneasy feeling I'd had that night on Eighth Avenue, when I saw him turn and walk back toward the gang of hoodlums that had insulted his girl—the feeling you get when the thought of a sudden, nasty death is clear in your mind.

In a way, I was prepared for what was coming; but when he spoke into the phone again, I jumped as if somebody had shot off a gun alongside my ear when I wasn't expecting it.

"What?" he said. "What's that?"

His voice was sharp, like the snap of a whip. He listened for a minute then. When he spoke next, his tone was soft—as soft as the thread of a hunting tiger's feet, and just about as full of the promise of trouble.

"Never mind!" he said. "I'm sorry, little girl—awfully sorry. It's my fault for letting you know such people. Don't worry—it's all right. Good-by!"

When he hung up the receiver, and turned around and looked at me, I don't mind admitting that for a second I'd have given my share of the million dollars that I was sure he was as good as worth, to have been anywhere else. His face was as white as a dead man's, and the muscles of his jaws were working and rippling under the tight skin like a nestful of mad snakes getting ready for business.

I thought at first that he was going to tear into me, but he didn't. After that one long look he didn't pay any more attention to me than as if I was a bootlegger and him a revenue agent. He just put on his coat and hat and started out.

I tagged along, saying this and that, and getting no answer. He flagged a taxi, and we started for Madison Square Garden and the world's heavyweight championship.

I had bet a nice chunk of money at six to one on Jordan to win; but while I sat beside him in that taxi, on the way down town, I was cussing myself for not having gone down hook, line, and sinker.

Jordan had already won the fight—I knew that. He had the fight won when he hung up the receiver after hearing from Elsie Raymond. The champ was a good

man, but I knew that he had no more chance with Jordan that night than a green rookie, fresh from the sand lots, trying to get Babe Ruth's job.

When the taxi stopped at the Garden, he got out and hit straight for the dressing room, still without saying a word. I chucked the driver a twenty-dollar bill—a twenty-dollar bill looked like a Russian ruble to me just then—and followed him, trying to keep from breaking right out into a roar of triumphant laughter.

Jordan came to his dressing room, and kept right on going.

"Here you are, King!" I yelled after him. "This is it!"

I might just as well have told the tide to stop rising. Jordan kept right on.

All of a sudden I slipped off the fleecy pink cloud I'd been riding on, and hit the hard bottom of nowhere with a bump that busted all my plans for the future. Jordan was headed for the champ's dressing room—and I knew why!

I gave a scream that sounded like all the lost souls in purgatory paging salvation in chorus, and started after him; but the soot was all over the family wash before I could get there.

Jordan busted into the champ's dressing room like an insane elephant looking for the rube that fed him the peanut shell loaded with red pepper. When I got to the door, all I could see was two big bodies flailing around on the floor like the tips of the tails of a couple of cyclones trying to go in different directions along the same path. The champ's handlers were dancing around with chairs and bottles in their hands, trying to locate some part of Jordan that they could smash without hitting their own man too.

Did you ever see a man light a cigar with a million-dollar bill—a million-dollar bill that you had a twenty-five-per-cent interest in? That's practically what I saw when I looked into that room.

There was my boy Jordan tearing the champion heavyweight of the world to ribbons—in the dressing room! In the dressing room, where the best he could get out of it was a fine for assault and battery! Less than an hour from going into the ring, where the fight would count, and there he was on the floor beating the everlasting daylights out of the champion of the world—and all for nothing! Not a solitary dime in it for anybody!

He was simply burning up a million dollars. I had touched off the blaze I wanted to start in him, but the darned thing had gone utterly wild. It was a million-dollar conflagration.

Usually I'm careful with such looks as I've got. I'm not in the habit of sticking my snoot into places where it's liable to get itself shaped over into a new nationality; but for once in my life I had such a terrible pain in my pocketbook that I didn't give a flute player's high note what happened to my features. I dived right into the middle of that explosion of human dynamite there on the floor, hoping that even yet I might somehow be able to save the day.

It was just like jumping off the top of the Woolworth Building and hoping that the law of gravity would be amended before you got to the ground. Something hit me somewhere and made me groggy. Then a lot of things hit me everywhere, and I went to sleep.

When I woke up, my nose had been moved over under the lee of my left eye, and had sprung a leak that would make any sailor jump for the lifeboats. King Jordan was standing in the corner, pretty well smashed up, with most of his clothes torn off, and with a young army of volunteers hanging on to him wherever they could get a hand hold.

And the champ! Oh, the champ! He looked like what was left of an old slipper that had had a couple of young bulldogs for a playmate for about a week. I found out later that in addition to other damages he had a busted collar bone and a dislocated shoulder.

I wasn't thinking about him then. All I had on what was left of my mind was the million-dollar chance that Jordan had pulled the plug on and let run down the drainpipe.

I got up on my feet, screaming cuss words at him. I was a little cuckoo, I guess. I shook my fist in his face, and called him such names as I could remember from a lifetime of listening to experts in the invention of profane epithets.

"He insulted my girl!" Jordan said.

"You boob!" I yelled at him. "You simple sap! That was a plant to get you worked up so that you'd fight. He never insulted your girl. I fixed it with her to phone and tell you that—"

I quit talking right there. I saw from the look in Jordan's eyes that he had lost

his taste for me. I saw, too, that the little army that was holding him was not so numerous as was necessary. He gave a sudden wrench, and something happened to me. His fighting blood sure was up!

VIII

WHEN I opened my eyes, and began to wonder where I was, a nurse with a white cap on her head told me that I mustn't worry about it.

I did some research work on what I could reach of myself with the arm that wasn't done up in splints. Outside of some stuff around my body, put there to lash down a couple of ribs that had got loose on deck in the storm, and a lot of bandages around my face and head, I seemed to be in pretty good shape.

A doctor came in pretty soon. He told me to lie still, and said that I'd be all right in about two weeks.

The next day Jordan came to see me.

"I'm sorry I beat you up, Hammond," he said; "but you had it coming to you. You had no business getting Elsie mixed up in that thing!"

"I meant well, King," I told him.

"I know you did," he said.

He stood there twisting his hat in his hands. He seemed to be half puzzled and half ashamed.

"I'm sorry I didn't make good for you," he blurted out finally. "I honestly tried hard. I don't know what was the matter with me."

"I do," I told him. "You had the stuff in you to build a blaze steady and furious enough to burn up anything that tried to stop you. Fear, anger, or pride can start a little flash of that fire, King; but only a strong, driving love will keep it fanned to white heat. You didn't have that sort of a passion for power, fame, or money; but you got the love of a woman into your heart, and that gave me something to work with. I tried to use it to make you champion of the world; but love is like any other highly explosive and inflammable stuff—dangerous to monkey with, because you never can be certain what it's going to do. I fooled with it and got blown up. No hard feelings on my part. We both had a chance to win a million, and we both lost. That's all there is to it."

"That makes it easier to say good-by, Hammond," he said. "I've been feeling mean about it, because I didn't lose. I won—won big! Elsie and I were married this morning. I went to the office of the Curtis & Ballard people here, and got a job as superintendent of their mining properties in the Tanana Valley. We're leaving for Alaska to-night."

Well, every man to his own idea of what a big winning is!

I got a letter from Jordan yesterday, mailed at Fairbanks, with a picture of the kid.

"This is King Jordan, Jr.," his father wrote. "Guess how many millions I think he's worth!"

BANISHMENT

My love, with all her loveliness,
Had once the heart to banish me;
She did not dream how deep the night
Became, how reft of starry light;
The sudden raindrops seemed like tears,
And all the pathos of the years
Assailed me poignantly.

My love, with all her tenderness,
I know would never bring me pain;
She did not dream one little word
Would mar the love notes of a bird;
A word unwitting and unwilling,
That wrought a loneliness and filled
The darkness and the rain,

Clinton Scollard

Poor Economy

THE STORY OF AN AMATEUR IN BURGLARY AND A NOVICE
IN DETECTIVE WORK

By Ray Cummings

THE local manager of the Globe Protective Association, specialists in burglary insurance, stared across his desk at the young man before him—a pleasant-looking young man with keen blue eyes, a shock of red hair, a pugnacious chin, and powerfully broad shoulders, who sat diffidently on the edge of his chair, with a huge bundle of newspapers across his knees.

"Why should I take you on as an adjuster?" the manager repeated. "Especially as you say you haven't had any experience of the work."

Jimmy Martin leaned forward earnestly.

"Because I might do you a lot of good. I'm only asking for a trial." He saw the manager's glance rest on the newspapers he was holding. "That's what I wanted to tell you about, Mr. Gregg," he added quickly. "I've been studying the Lead Pencil Willy burglaries. I've read everything that's been printed about every one. Here are all the different papers—I've saved them for two months." He saw that he had aroused the manager's interest, and went on swiftly. "This Lead Pencil Willy is sure to come to Seattle. You'll have to get after him."

"The police—" Gregg began.

"The police didn't do anything in Frisco, did they? Or in Portland? Or up in Sitka, where Willy started? If you depend on them, you'll go broke. That's honest, Mr. Gregg, and you know it!"

The manager's gesture was noncommittal. Without admitting it, he could not help agreeing with his visitor.

"That's where I come in," Jimmy proceeded, his confidence growing. "I've got a hunch I can solve this Lead Pencil Willy mystery. I'll give you my dope right now. You take me on, and when he hits Seattle I'm liable to save you a bunch of money."

At the moment, Lead Pencil Willy was the most noted and most elusive criminal on the Pacific Coast. From San Diego to Sitka he was wanted on a hundred different charges. His exploits varied as to time and place, but were almost identical in method. He was one of those freak criminals who become prominent every decade or so—the aristocrats of crime, who originate and perfect their own unique methods, who take an inordinate pride in every successful job accomplished, and who gloat loudly and sardonically at their bewildered pursuers after each successive escape.

Lead Pencil Willy's methods were daring but simple. He got into the homes of the wealthy, the merely comfortable, and the poor—how, nobody ever found out, for he never left any evidence of his entrance or his exit—and abstracted whatever valuables happened to be there. His affairs were never marked by violence to human life—possibly not because of any restraint on the burglar's part, but because he was sufficiently clever to avoid being seen or heard at his work.

And in order that he might receive proper credit for his skill, in each case he left a sarcastic but illiterate note, with a lead pencil stuck through the paper, as a sort of trademark, so that no one might remain in doubt as to his handiwork.

Lead Pencil Willy was operating in Portland at the time when Jimmy Martin presented himself at the Seattle branch of the Globe Protective Association. Previously, Jimmy had been scaling logs in the Duke's Spur Lumber Company's camp on the slope of Mount Rainier. Then, while in Seattle on a holiday, he had become engaged to Alice Bailey. Lumbering didn't sound so well after that. What Jimmy wanted was something a little less low-brow, something

with more of a future, and, above all, something that would keep him in Seattle.

The Lead Pencil Willy mystery had fascinated Jimmy. One evening, while he was talking to Alice most despondently about his lack of business prospects, which promised to delay their wedding indefinitely, he suddenly hit upon an idea that seemed like a possible explanation of these burglaries about which the whole Pacific Coast was speculating.

Jimmy told his theory to Alice. The next morning he told it to the Globe's manager. On the following Monday he went on the company's pay roll, praying in his heart that Lead Pencil Willy would come to Seattle soon.

II

THE Parsons affair developed late on Thursday afternoon. Jimmy happened to be in the manager's office when the telephone call from old Jonathan Parsons came in. It was a Lead Pencil Willy burglary!

Jimmy sat there with his heart thumping wildly, while Gregg shot staccato questions over the wire and made a few penciled notations of the answers.

"Our man will come right up," he stated in conclusion. "Leave everything just as it is."

"Has he notified headquarters?" Jimmy put in eagerly. "Tell him not to, until I get there."

"Hasn't done a thing but phone us," said Gregg, as he hung up the receiver. "It's Lead Pencil Willy all right—at Jonathan Parsons's! Great Scott!" Gregg mopped his forehead, and gazed anxiously at his youthful adjuster. "I hope I'm not a fool to trust you with this, Martin," he added.

"You're not," said Jimmy, rising briskly to his feet. "I'll get right up there."

"Wait a minute," his boss commanded. "You've heard about old man Parsons?"

Jimmy had. He knew a good deal about Jonathan Parsons, just as practically every one did who lived in Seattle and read the newspapers.

Skinflint Parsons, as he was frequently called, was an aged bachelor, popularly supposed to be inordinately wealthy, who lived in a comparatively modest home on Queen Anne Hill. He was credited with being the meanest and most parsimonious man on the Pacific Coast. He was not a miser, but merely a maniac on economy. He would buy an automobile in the morning, and in

the afternoon he would deplore the fact that he could not sell his newspaper back to a newsboy after he had read it. He would spend a dollar in gasoline driving about town in search of a cigar store, in order that he might save ten cents on a box of cigars.

His fetish, in short, was the greatness of little things. He worshiped, not the almighty dollar, but the almighty penny.

All this Jimmy Martin knew. He knew also that if old Jonathan Parsons had been robbed by Lead Pencil Willy, it was likely to cost the Globe Protective Association a good deal of money. He was not surprised at Gregg's perturbation.

"Sure I know Skinflint Parsons," Jimmy answered. "Has he got much of a burglary policy?"

"Ten thousand dollars," Gregg answered dismally.

Jimmy whistled in dismay, but his heart beat exultantly. Ten thousand dollars! He *must* succeed on this case. His job would be made permanent. He would be famous all up and down the coast, for the Lead Pencil Willy robberies had the smartest of them guessing. His salary would be raised. Alice and he could—

"Sit down a minute," said Gregg. "Here's what he says."

III

JIMMY MARTIN approached the residence of Jonathan Parsons, on Queen Anne Hill, with an outward show of a confidence that he was far from feeling. He had elected to play the part of superdetective if Lead Pencil Willy should come to Seattle. Lead Pencil Willy had arrived. The police had not yet been notified. He—Jimmy Martin—was first on the ground. It was up to him to make good.

He rang the front doorbell. Jonathan Parsons answered it promptly and in person. Jimmy had never seen old Mr. Parsons before, except at a distance. He found him small and wizened, with a stringy neck like a chicken, and beady little eyes that bored into one.

"You from the Globe people? Come right in."

The old man's voice was thin, raspy, and querulous. He turned and led the way into a dim living room. As he shuffled along the hall, Jimmy noted that he wore a shiny black silk coat, old trousers, and carpet slippers.

In the living room Jimmy sat down on

the chair that Mr. Parsons indicated. The room was gloomy in the twilight.

"How about turning on a little light?" Jimmy suggested.

He could see the old man hesitating, as if it hurt him to begin consuming electricity a moment before it was absolutely necessary. Then, grudgingly, Mr. Parsons switched on the center electrolier.

The room was an average room, Jimmy thought—nothing remarkable about it in any way, except its complete lack of everything that creates an atmosphere of home.

"Can I smoke?" Jimmy asked.

He saw that Mr. Parsons was waiting for him to take the initiative, and he was a little at a loss how to begin. He also saw a cigar projecting from the pocket of the old man's jacket. He eyed it for an instant, and then pulled a cigarette from his own pocket and lighted it.

"Tell me all about it," he said cheerfully.

"Nothing much to tell," said Jonathan Parsons. "I came downstairs this afternoon about four o'clock. Been home all day. Had lunch in the dining room about twelve. Never heard a sound in the house all afternoon. Found things just like they are now. Take a look around—I haven't touched a thing."

Jimmy rose to his feet with alacrity. The first thing he saw, lying on a little side table by the huge French windows, was an old half sheet of note paper, scrawled with penciled words, and with a miserable little stub of lead pencil stuck through it.

"That's the first thing I saw," said old man Parsons. "It was lying right there. Read it."

Jimmy picked it up, holding it carefully so that the pencil would not fall out. This is what he read:

Yous is too easy. Much obleiged. See yous again later.

LEAD PENCIL WILLY.

The words were so wretchedly scrawled that there was no character in the handwriting—a characteristic of most of the Lead Pencil Willy letters, Jimmy remembered. He laid the note back on the table without comment.

"What was stolen?" he asked.

Old Mr. Parsons drew a long sheet of paper from his pocket.

"I've got it all here—everything that's missing. Made the list while I was waiting for you."

Jimmy saw it was a long list—silverware, mostly—with the value set beside each item. At the bottom was the total—six thousand two hundred and four dollars.

Jimmy waved it aside.

"Let me look the place over first," he suggested.

All the stolen articles had been taken from the dining room and the butler's pantry. Jimmy made a tour of inspection of the entire lower floor of the house—living room, dining room, butler's pantry, and kitchen.

It was the chilly weather of late fall; every window on the floor was closed and locked on the inside. There were only three exterior doors—that to the front porch, the kitchen back door, and the one leading down into the cellar. All were locked on the inside; and, so far as Jimmy could determine, none had been tampered with.

"Everything was just like this?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Parsons. "I don't see how he could have got in or out. You can't get up to the roof and down without a ladder. He certainly isn't in the house now. I've been all over it."

The living room and the kitchen were in excellent order, the dining room and the butler's pantry in thorough confusion. Drawers were pulled out, and their linen contents strewn about. A huge mahogany highboy in the dining room was stripped of the silver which, old Mr. Parsons explained, always stood upon it. In the butler's pantry the elaborate mahogany silver chest stood with its drawers open and empty. One or two heavy silver spoons lay on the floor, as if the intruder, in his haste, had neglected to gather them up. In both rooms there were stray articles of silver lying about, neglected either because of Lead Pencil Willy's lack of time, or because of his discrimination as to value.

A truly extraordinary number of heavy articles had been taken—in broad daylight, without noise, and with no determinable means of the intruder's entrance or exit. It was a typical Lead Pencil Willy job.

IV

THEY were back in the living room.

"Sit down," said Jimmy. "I've got a few questions to ask."

He rather thought he sounded like an experienced detective, though he was far from feeling like one.

Old Mr. Parsons sat down—a bit impatiently, Jimmy thought. Obviously he considered that he had done his part, and all he wanted now was to collect his insurance as speedily as possible.

"You don't live here alone?" Jimmy began.

"No," answered the old man. "Mrs. Briggs is my housekeeper."

He smiled at Jimmy, evidently trying to be as pleasant as he could about the whole affair.

"Was she home to-day?"

"Yes. She's home now. Finished up after lunch and went to her room on the third floor. Been sewing all afternoon. She's up there now."

"She knows about the robbery?"

Jimmy felt that this was a somewhat inane question, but he let it go.

"I brought her down as soon as I discovered it." Mr. Parsons waved his hand expressively. "Women are all fools. She went into hysterics—as if I blamed *her*! I didn't—she's been with me for nearly twenty-seven years."

Jimmy nodded.

"Everything was all right when she went upstairs after lunch?"

"Yes, certainly."

"What time was that?"

"Two o'clock—about."

"She didn't hear anything during the afternoon?"

"How could she?" demanded Mr. Parsons. "She was on the third floor. I could hear her sewing machine going. There wasn't a sound down here."

"Let me talk to her," said Jimmy, feeling more hopeless the further he progressed. "Ask her down, will you? Oh, just a minute," he added, as the old man went to the door. "How about headquarters? The police—have you phoned them yet?"

"The police? No, I haven't. Why should I? All I want is my insurance—some of the money back that I've been wasting all my life. This darned thing is trouble enough without calling in the police. Publicity—rotten newspaper trash—I've had enough of that in my life! Police—bah!"

He spoke with such vehemence that Jimmy laughed.

"All right—don't get excited; but when I've got through, we'll have to call them, you know. They'll want to get after Lead Pencil Willy, even if you don't."

Jimmy's interview with the elderly Mrs. Briggs was entirely unproductive. She was almost incoherent with excitement and protestations of innocence. She had nothing to add to the facts as her employer had presented them, and Jimmy, convinced that she was speaking the truth, dismissed her as soon as possible.

"When do I get paid for the loss?" old Mr. Parsons demanded, when they were again alone.

"Sit down," said Jimmy. "Let's talk some more."

He hadn't the faintest idea what he could talk about, but somehow he couldn't bring himself to telephone to the police—to admit failure!

The Lead Pencil Willy note was still lying on the table beside him. He picked it up absently, and the little stub of pencil fell out and dropped to the floor. Old Mr. Parsons stooped and handed it back to him.

"Thanks," said Jimmy.

He took the pencil. It was hardly more than two inches long, but the last letters of the maker's name, and the grade—No. 3—still remained in silver letters.

Jimmy's eyes went to the few scrawled words that the robber had written; and then, with his heart thumping in his throat so that it almost choked him, an idea came. He saw daylight!

His first instinct was to smoke, in order to hide his excitement. The cigar was still projecting from the old man's upper coat pocket. Jimmy eyed it.

"Haven't got a cigar, have you?" he asked casually. "I just smoked my last cigarette."

Reluctantly, as if his soul was torn with anguish, old Mr. Parsons, still determined to be pleasant, handed over the cigar. There was a lead pencil projecting from the same pocket.

"Lend me that pencil too, will you?" Jimmy requested. "Don't want to use this one"—indicating Lead Pencil Willy's little stub. "It might be needed as evidence, you know."

He took the pencil. It was a long, new one, freshly sharpened. With total disregard for the sanctity of the Lead Pencil Willy note as evidence, Jimmy turned the paper over and scrawled a few words on its back with the borrowed pencil.

"Mr. Parsons!" he said. He tried to keep his voice level, but there was an exultant note in it, and his pugnacious jaw

was more pugnacious than ever. "We probably won't have to send for the police, after all—unless you insist. I've got the goods on you! You didn't have any burglary here. You're a faker, as nine out of ten, or maybe all, of these Lead Pencil Willy people are. I've got the goods on you, and you know it. I can see it in your face this minute. Are you going to own up and call it off, or do I phone for the police? I'll bet I can find your stolen stuff right here in this house!"

And old Mr. Parsons, taken wholly by surprise at this sudden outburst, confessed.

V

"You see it was this way," said Jimmy later, explaining it to Alice Bailey. "That Lead Pencil Willy note was written with a soft pencil—a No. 1. The little stub that Parsons had stuck in it was a hard pencil—a No. 3. The one he had in his pocket was a soft one—that was what he wrote the note with."

"But why," asked Alice, "when he wrote the note, didn't he use the same pencil to stick in the paper? That was what anybody would do."

"Yes," said Jimmy, "any ordinary person would, but not Skinfint Parsons. That's what queered his game—his own meanness. He figured it was no use to waste a new lead pencil when a little stub would do just as well; so right at the last

minute he put the new one back in his pocket, and hunted up that miserable little stub to stick in the paper. He overlooked the difference in the lead. Poor economy, I'd call it!"

The complete verification of Jimmy's theories in regard to the Lead Pencil Willy burglaries came nearly a week later, in the form of a letter addressed to Jimmy Martin, in care of the Globe Protective Association, Seattle. The affair on Queen Anne Hill had leaked out and had got into the newspapers, in spite of the fact that the Globe Company preferred no charges against old Mr. Parsons. Jimmy received, in addition to a permanent job and an increased salary, newspaper praise that pleased Alice immensely.

The letter in question was postmarked "San Francisco." It was entirely written in lead pencil, even to the address on the envelope. It read:

DEAR SIR:

This here West Coast publicks a bunch a crooks. I'm ritin to thank you for what you done. I pulled off two jobs in Frisco an one in Sitka an two in Portland an thats all, selp me. Just because I was good all these here crooks with burglary assurance gets to stealing there own stuff an blaming me. It aint right. When a guys clever enough to dope out something good nobody wont never let him have it in peace. It aint right. Much obleiged for what you done.

Respeckfly,

LEAD PENCIL WILLY.

THE WISDOM OF SHAKESPEARE

GRAVE *Hamlet* is not always prince—

Perchance he plays the clown;

A wink, in Shakespeare's day and since,

May dissipate a frown.

Poor *Caliban* is not all beast—

Sometimes he seems a sage;

The greatest of us and the least

May double on life's stage.

King Lear lives long and then goes mad,

While *Romeo* dies young;

How strange is human fate, how sad,

When by the poet sung!

From *Cæsar* mighty truths we learn—

From *Dromio* as well;

To Shakespeare would that men might turn,

And on his wisdom dwell!

Harold Seton

Times Have Changed

A NOVEL OF UP-TO-DATE ADVENTURE IN THE BOHEMIA AND
THE SUBURBIA OF NEW YORK

By Elmer Davis

Author of "The Princess Cecilia," etc.

XIX

O'RELL, when he had recovered his breath and his self-possession, sat up, felt himself, and rose rather shakily to his feet. He didn't seem to be much injured. The soft meadow, covered with long grass, had broken his fall. No doubt he would ache to-morrow, but nothing serious had happened.

Beside him was Irene, apparently unhurt, though her scarlet-lined cape was split almost in two. Lorna Lockwood was staring sadly at a black smear of mud on her white bloomers, but she, too, had escaped without serious damage. Blish, who had tumbled out through the door, was feeling himself all over, but had discovered no broken bones. The driver, kneeling beside his car, was swearing outrageously, but more because of the damage to the machine than on account of the scratches that disfigured his face.

But the wagon? Had the shattering explosion of its load gone unheard in the pre-occupation of their senses with more immediate shocks? O'Rell wondered, stared, and stared again.

Where was the vast crater which, as his experience of high explosives had taught him, ought to have engulfed the crossroads, the wagon, the taxi, and all of them? It wasn't there. The wagon lay on its side, smashed and splintered. From its torn canvas cover protruded the debris of shattered boxes; and boxes and wagon were wet and smeared with something that made a pool in the roadway. It wasn't blood. O'Rell stepped forward and looked again.

"Eggs!" he gasped.

"Yes," cried the driver, leaving his

frightened horse, which he was trying to cut out of the harness, and coming forward with blazing fury. He was an Italian, and he flamed with Mediterranean passion.

"Yes! Eggs! Goddam! Twenty crates of eggs! I get forty cent the doz'—sell 'em by the road. Ah, but I will have you pinched! How I laugh when I see you before the judge, huh? No stop—no! Everybody else, they give Anselmo the road when they see my sign. But you, no—no stop! All right—I stop you! Your car is bust. You will walk away. I get the police from Oceanmere—ha! They catch you, and I tell the judge you bust twenty crates of eggs, and on Sunday, and he say you deserve to go to jail. Damfool not stop for explosives. Ha!"

Blish and Lorna and Irene had gathered behind O'Rell, still shaking, all of them, from the shock.

"We seem to have busted quite a few eggs," said Blish reflectively.

"Ha, you laugh! I fix you! Three—four mile all around here—no house, no crossroad, no getaway. I run to Oceanmere, I get the police."

"Not Oceanmere!" said Blish in panic.

"My God, that's my town!"

"Your town? Huh! I see if you own the police!"

"Wait a minute," Blish protested. "We—can't we square this? Here's twenty."

"Twenty dollar! Ha! For twenty crates of eggs? No—I get the police!"

O'Rell looked apprehensively down the road. There was no car in sight, but there was no certainty that they had eluded their pursuers.

"We'd better square it with this fellow, Byron," he said softly. "If—you get me."

Copyright, 1922, by Elmer Davis—This story began in the October (1922) number of MURPHY'S MAGAZINE

"I get you," Blish agreed between chattering teeth. "Now, then, friend, how much will it take?"

"Twenty crates—two hundred forty doz'—forty cent a doz'—that come to ninety-six dollar."

"Ninety-six dollars! Come on—don't kid us!"

"Ninety-six dollar. You pay, no? All right!"

"Clout him one over the bean," the chauffeur advised from his retreat beside the disabled taxi. "The meter says twenty-three eighty—don't forget that. I got to get mine before you pay for them eggs."

In saner moments O'Rell would have stood out against extortion; but far down the road he saw the dust of an approaching car. Blish saw it, too; and from his expression O'Rell guessed that he, too, was seeing visions of a sluggish policeman coming slowly back to consciousness, and of grimly persistent detectives somehow finding the trail.

Blish began to go through his pockets and pull out rolls of bills. O'Rell did the same. They managed to make up the ninety-six dollars.

They thrust the money into Anselmo's hands with a hurried eagerness that surprised him. Then Blish sadly turned to the girls.

"I guess we walk the rest of it," he told them; "but it's only half a mile."

"I'd walk farther than that for food," said Lorna. "The old machine can't run on faith, hope, and charity the way it used to. It needs bacon."

"Then come along," said Blish eagerly. "Maybe they'll stop to look over the wreckage, and we can beat 'em to the bridge," he added, aside, to O'Rell.

But O'Rell was turning back to the disabled taxi.

"What's the matter?" Blish yelled. "For the love of—"

"Got to get the quilt," said O'Rell, lifting out his suit case.

"Are you crazy?"

"Not yet—not crazy enough to leave this thing here on the road, after all I've done for it to-night. If they've trailed us, they won't need this for identification. Come with me, old friend! Whither thou goest I will go."

"And make the going quick," said Blish, setting off toward Oceanmere at as rapid a pace as his short legs could manage.

"Wait a minute!" said the chauffeur. "How about the fare?"

"Come down into Oceanmere with us," O'Rell suggested. "Anselmo has about cleaned us out. My friend can get some more at home."

"Oh, no, I don't! With half an hour's work I can patch this car up, and no garage bills—see? If I go into town and leave it here, how do I know somebody don't patch it up for me, and take it away for me, before I get back? This is the company's car. If it gets smashed, I can put up an alibi; but if somebody gets away with it, they'll think I'm in with him. Let's see the money. You've got it. I saw you put it back in your pocket after you'd squared this crazy wop."

O'Rell felt in his pockets. Two ten-dollar bills and a dollar or so in silver—and the distant car was drawing near. He thrust the bills into the driver's hand.

"Three eighty short," the chauffeur warned him. "Come across with the rest of it, or—"

O'Rell's tormented spirit rose up against this last affliction. Should the man who had felled a policeman, and who very possibly was about to pay the penalty for that bit of youthful folly, give way before a taxi driver? His hand reached out and clutched the chauffeur's collar.

"Twenty dollars!" he said coldly. "Take it or leave it—but if you don't take it, I'll break your face!"

The driver looked into the high school principal's eyes, pocketed the bills, and turned back to the repairing of his car.

"Evidently," said O'Rell thoughtfully, "he wasn't a cokey. However—"

He started off down the road at a brisk trot. The others were already well away.

Looking back over his shoulder, he saw the other car stop, as he had hoped, at the crossroads—but only for a moment. Anselmo, having freed his horse from the wrecked wagon, was off down the road, and the taxi driver was evidently in no hospitable mood. The car started again. It would catch them long before they could reach safety.

Blish dropped back as O'Rell came up to him. The girls trudged morosely on.

"Marky, do you think we can square ourselves?"

O'Rell said nothing, for there was nothing to say. The car approached, slowed down—and then drove carefully past them.

It was a limousine, with a chauffeur in gray whipcord. Its only occupant was an elderly gentleman in evening dress, calmly sleeping on the cushions. Blish and O'Rell looked at each other and groaned.

"The wicked flee when no man pursueth," said O'Rell.

"And just for that," Blish added, "we paid Anselmo ninety-six good units of American currency!"

"And twenty more to the driver," said O'Rell. "I'll have to borrow car fare home from you."

"Not from me, kid! Anselmo's got mine. Unless the good wife has something put aside for a rainy day, you stay here till the banks are open. Cheap at the price, Marky—cheap at the price. I breathe easily once more."

"So do I," said O'Rell. "Most of it was profit from our party at the club, anyway; but it's lucky I drew thirty dollars from the bank yesterday morning, instead of seven and a half. Mysterious are the ways of Providence!"

"Well," said Blish mournfully, "let's forget it. The girls are waiting."

Irene and Lorna had done their best to improve the interval by getting the mud off their clothes, but without much success. However, they had powdered their noses, and Lorna put her vanity case back into her bag with something of a flourish.

"Cheero!" she called. "The old countenance may have been rebuilt at the factory, but it's as good as new. Age cannot wither her—at least, not yet. And now, friend Byron, when do we eat?"

But Mark O'Rell knew that it would take more than food to restore his self-respect. He needed a bath, and his clothes needed a brushing; still more did he need a shave. The glamour that had hung over this excursion when they left the dance hall had been dispelled by the accident and its expensive consequences. He was tired and sleepy, hungry and unshaven, and broke; and he was walking into a strange town at day-break, in the company of a fat man with torn clothes and broken eyeglasses, and a couple of mud-spattered girls in carnival dress. He wouldn't have blamed the village police for arresting them all on general principles. Gabe Gooch, the vigilant town marshal of Wynwood, would certainly have done that.

But the police of Oceanmere were nowhere in sight. Like the rest of the town,

they seemed to sleep late on Sundays. The four trudged in gloomy silence down paved streets that reëchoed to their footsteps in the stillness of early morning, between pretty stucco bungalows, and rose gardens that somehow had been made to blossom on this strip of inhospitable sand; but the gardens were empty, and on the bungalows blinds were drawn. Oceanmere, thanks be to kindly Morpheus, was still asleep.

And then Blish was turning in through a brick gateway and leading them up the steps of one of the villas—a red-roofed house with a row of French windows on the ground floor, opening on the garden. As they climbed the steps, they realized for the first time just how tired and hungry and dispirited they all were.

"Never mind," Blish whispered, as the key turned in the lock. "Everybody still asleep, but I'll rout June out, and she'll rout the maid out, and we'll have breakfast on the table in half an hour."

They tiptoed softly into the darkened house, and Blish shut the door behind them with great care.

"Now I'll go up and explain to June," he told them. "You just go into the living room there, and sit down. She'll be along in five minutes."

He began the stealthy ascent of the stairs; but before he had reached the turn at the landing a voice rang out in the stillness like a firebell in the night:

"Byron, is that you?"

"Yes, darling," said Blish hastily, and clattered on up the steps.

He vanished. They heard a whisper; then a door slammed, and there was silence.

Lorna strolled into the living room, looked about her in the dimness, and finally, without taking off her raincoat, sat down on a couch.

"Something tells me," she said softly, "that a terrible mistake has been made!"

XX

O'RELL set his suit case down beside the grand piano and lit a cigarette.

"Well, we're here," he said.

"We certainly are," said Lorna; "all dressed up and flat broke, and thirty miles from home. Somehow the care-free Bohemian enthusiasm of last night has faded."

She threw open the French windows and let in the morning sunlight. They all looked at one another, rather shamefaced.

"Yes, look!" said Lorna remorselessly.

"If you're ashamed to look at one another, look at me. The morning light is certainly hard on these synthetic faces!"

She threw off her raincoat and cap, strode up to the gilt-framed mirror on the wall, and stared at herself.

"Walk up, friends, and peruse the ravages of time. Byron was right—in the merry old days we all used to go down to the Village for breakfast after a Palette dance; but that was while I could still face the bus conductor with confidence in my charms. Times have changed!"

O'Rell was somewhat startled. In the full light of the sun, Lorna didn't look much like the radiant creature who had dazzled him across the footlights.

"Turn about!" said Lorna grimly. "You know what I look like; now see what you look like. That collar has seen better days, hasn't it? And you could use a shave. All right—Irene next! Lucky kid—you're only eighteen, and nothing can hurt your complexion; but you look a bit bedraggled, don't you? I expect you wish you had a skirt on, too. Black trunks and black stockings are all right at a costume ball, but they are rarely met with on Sunday morning in a peaceful suburb. We're lucky nobody was up to see us. They'd have set the dogs on us!"

"Why rub it in?" said O'Rell gloomily.

"Why? Well, we all know just what we look like. We know what we'll look like to a lady who never met us—a lady who's coming downstairs as soon as she gets her clothes on, to ask us to stay for breakfast. If she seems a little cool, if her welcome is a little more than thin and less than kind, don't blame her. She has reason!"

Irene began to sob.

"Don't get your eyes red," said the merciless Lorna. "You look bad enough now. Besides, cousin dear, you've got to get used to this in the merry life of the stage. You'll walk farther than this sometimes, and with less chance of breakfast at the end of the trip. Oh, well! *Ridi, pagliaccio!*"

She went through the motions of beating a drum, and O'Rell's nerves gave way.

"Shut up!" he burst out. "I beg your pardon," he added, in contrition. "I don't think I ever spoke so sharply to a woman before."

"You never did?" said Lorna. "Young man, you have a lot to learn; and unless I'm greatly mistaken, the term of school begins shortly."

"I wish I'd gone home last night," he growled. "Back to Wynwood!"

"I wish you'd gone, too," said Irene. "You're all trying to break my spirit and ruin my career, every one of you; but you can't do it. I'll never, never go back to Wynwood!"

Above them the muffled sounds continued. The hostess who ought to have been up at sunrise, clipping the climbing roses, was taking a good deal of time to dress. Lorna yawned once or twice, and then picked up the morning paper, which Blish had brought in from the porch. The magazine supplement, gay in red and blue, she tossed aside. She yawned again over the comic sheet, and finally turned in desperation to the front page of the news section. When she looked at this, she started up with a cry.

"Did I hear you say," she asked O'Rell, "that you ought to have gone home last night?"

"You heard me. If there's any doubt about it, I'll say it again."

"Oh, no," said Lorna. "You were right. Read this!"

He read it, with Irene leaning over his shoulder:

SCHOOLGIRL FLEES WITH PRINCIPAL IN LOVE PACT

Wife Swoons as Double Life Is Revealed

GIRL'S KIN MAKE DEATH THREAT AGAINST ABDUCTOR OF ORPHAN

Society circles in the exclusive suburb of Wynwood, New Jersey, were aroused last night by the news that Principal Mark O'Rell of the Wynwood High School, war hero, social favorite, and a bridegroom of last June, was being sought by the police on a charge of abduction. His alleged victim is pretty eighteen-year-old Irene Laird, the most brilliant student in this year's graduating class at O'Rell's school.

"Humph!" said O'Rell. "If the rest of it is as true as that—"

But he read on.

The girl, who is an orphan, makes her home with an uncle, James Teener, a prominent restaurateur of Wynwood. Yesterday she disappeared, taking with her fifty dollars from her uncle's cash register, and leaving a note saying that she had determined to live her own life. At the same time O'Rell left home, giving as a pretext that he was going to New York to a college fraternity banquet. When Teener reported his niece's disappearance to the police, Gabriel Gooch, the town marshal, remembered that he had seen the two leaving town on the same train. The girl had taken a

seat in the rear coach, while O'Rell sat in the smoker, apparently to disarm suspicion.

"Yes," growled the abductor, "that sounds like Gabe Gooch! However—"

Suspicion was confirmed when Mrs. Caroline Van Sickles and Mrs. Elvina Purcell, members of the Ladies' Aid Society, in which Mrs. Teener is an active worker, told of seeing O'Rell and his pupil embracing each other in a shady nook on Elmwood Avenue on the previous evening. It is the theory of Marshal Gooch that plans for the flight were laid at this meeting. A general alarm was at once sent out, and the New York police were asked to search hotels and rooming houses and watch outgoing trains.

"That first caress came high," said Lorna.

O'Rell read on.

O'Rell's marriage less than a year ago to Miss Marjorie Redman, daughter of C. L. Redman, New York jute broker, and one of the favorites of the younger set, was an outstanding social event in Wynwood. Mrs. O'Rell was at the home of friends in the country last night, and could not be reached by reporters, but it was understood that she was prostrated by the news.

Her parents were also out of town, but a woman relative of Mrs. O'Rell, who did not wish her name to be used, disclosed exclusively to a reporter for the *Morning Patriot* the fact that though friends of the young couple thought them ideally happy, Mrs. O'Rell's family had long suspected that her husband was what this woman relative described as "a snake in sheep's clothing."

"The identity of the relative is no mystery to me," observed O'Rell.

It was learned that the Redman family knew little of O'Rell, who had met his future wife while she was doing war work in France. A member of the family said last night to a *Morning Patriot* reporter:

"It is only too clear to me that Marjorie has been deceived by a designing adventurer. Some of us had long suspected him of duplicity, but she would never hear a word against him. I fear this news will break her heart. My niece's sad experience, however, will not be without its compensations if it teaches other girls to distrust the hasty promptings of impulse."

Further confirmation was given to the police by Felix Redman, cashier of the Wynwood National Bank, who is Mrs. O'Rell's cousin. He said that his suspicions had been aroused when O'Rell drew an unusually large amount of money from the bank yesterday morning—

"Thirty dollars!" said O'Rell savagely.

But that he had supposed the young couple were going away somewhere for a holiday. When he met Mrs. O'Rell, later in the day, he dreaded to inform her of his suspicions, and last night he reproached himself bitterly for having allowed the alleged miscreant to escape.

Mr. and Mrs. Teener were outspoken in their threats of vengeance.

"Jail is too good for men like him," said Mrs. Teener bitterly, "who lure innocent and unsuspecting girls away from loving homes."

"If ever I get my hands on the scoundrel," her husband added, "he'll never live to reach the electric chair!"

Marshal Gooch admitted that he had made arrangements to take O'Rell to the Newark jail, if arrested, fearing lest threats of lynching, which were heard freely last night, should lead to violence.

O'Rell pushed the paper from him and reached for his hat.

"Give my excuses to Mrs. Blish," he said.

"Where are you going?" Lorna demanded. "They'll be watching the trains."

"Going? I'm going back to Wynwood. I'm going to tell Gabe Gooch he's crazy. Then I'm going to offer a few remarks to Aunt Cordelia and Cousin Felix. After that I'm going to find Marjorie and take what's coming to me. It's probably a good deal; but first I'll have it out with the family. A show-down has been due for quite a while, and now we'll have it!"

Lorna shook her head.

"I don't know whether you're a hero," she said, "or just a crazy fool. Do you want to be lynched?"

"Bunk! I know that town of Wynwood. There isn't a man in it with enough nerve to start a lynching."

"I wouldn't be sure of that," said Lorna. "Irene's uncle—"

"He keeps a shotgun in the back room," Irene offered.

"Quite so; and it's hard to argue with a shotgun, particularly if it happens to open the discussion. Yes, I know you want to tell them; but let me tell them first."

"You?"

"Certainly—me. Irene has been with me ever since five o'clock yesterday afternoon. Where were you before that, child?"

"I had lunch at Child's," Irene confessed, "and then I went to a movie."

"I've got an alibi for the afternoon," said O'Rell. "I was with Byron."

"Then all is well," said Lorna, "provided you don't spoil the party by going out and looking for the lynchers. Go back to Wynwood and have it out with the family, if you want to; but not till Irene and I have gone there first."

"I won't go back to Wynwood!" Irene declared. "It's all right for him, if he wants to explain to his wife. He lives up on the hill, with all the rich families that

despise us hard-working people down by the railroad. Treat us like the dirt under their feet, they do. Wynwood may be all right when you live on Elmwood Avenue, but it don't look so good from Station Street. I won't go back!"

"If you don't go back," said Lorna grimly, "and go back with me, your next railroad journey is likely to be to a reform school. Yes, dear cousin, that is the cruel fact. Think it over. The first thing to do is to get you and friend O'Rell some miles apart, and keep you some miles apart."

"But you won't leave before Mrs. Blish comes down?" O'Rell asked. "She'd think it was queer."

"She'd think it was queerer," said Lorna, "if that town marshal came in and pinched you at the breakfast table."

"Gabe Gooch will never get this far. He's probably watching the ferries."

"Well," Lorna conceded, "I guess we could all think at least as straight if we had some breakfast; but there's no use spoiling the Sunday morning calm of this happy home by the news that its guests are wanted for assorted felony. Hide the paper behind the piano, and as soon as breakfast is over I'll make some polite excuses. Irene and I will take the next train for New York—yes, child, clothes and all. Wrap that split cloak around you the right way, and nobody'll know you've got nothing but tights underneath. I can't hide my costume, but I'm old and tough, and I can stand being stared at. As soon as we get to town we'll call up your uncle and tell him to lay aside the shotgun; and then I'll restore you, weeping, to his arms. Beat it again, if you want to, but make sure that our friend here is safe at home before you do it. As for you, friend O'Rell, you stay here and exchange small talk with Byron and his wife till along about tea time. After that it will be safe for you to go home and meet the family."

O'Rell had to admit that there was sense in this. Lorna was as hungry and sleepy as he was himself, but she could think straight when his only reaction was a blind anger.

"You're a wonderful woman," he said, and meant it.

"Not at all," said Lorna. "I've had what our friend Irene here would call a romantic life. In other words, I've been through the mill; and whatever else experience may have taught me, it taught me to

stand the gaff and keep cool. Romance, love, and crime no longer interfere with the operation of the old intellect."

"I'm sorry to see you go," he declared.

"Great as is my grief at our separation," said Lorna, "it's not half as great as if I had to get up early in the morning to give testimony at your trial. Now, have you got any money?"

"Money?"

"Oh, not much money—car fare back to town. We drove to the dance with some friends, and I haven't a cent in my clothes. Irene, where's that alleged fifty dollars you are quoted as having?"

"I left it in my coat," Irene confessed.

"And your coat's in my room. Well, unless Al's paid me another visit in my absence, it's probably still there. If our friend can give us car fare to town, your fifty will take us to Wynwood; and if you regret the futile expenditure, think how much nicer it is than to have the State of New Jersey paying your car fare."

O'Rell was looking through his pockets.

"I have a dollar eighty-five. That ought to take you both to town."

"Better let us have it all," said Lorna.

"You can get what you need from Byron—or, if Byron hasn't got it, from his wife."

A door opened upstairs.

"Here comes the hostess," said Lorna.

"Pack up your troubles, friends, and do your darndest to smile."

XXI

O'RELL was nearest to the door, and the handsome girl who entered came to him with outstretched hand. As a married man, he could see why her entrance had been so long delayed. She had dressed with great care and considerable effect, in a morning gown of heliotrope silk. More than that, she had done her hair with elaborate attention, and her complexion as well. Evidently she intended to look her best, and indeed she did look extraordinarily handsome. O'Rell felt that the contrast with the travel-worn voyagers was a rather unhappy one.

"I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting, Mr. O'Rell," she bubbled as he took her hand; "but Byron woke me out of a sound sleep, and—good grandmother, what's this?"

For the first time her eyes fell on Lorna and Irene, their costumes mud-splashed, their faces as nature had made them.

"Oh, didn't Byron tell you?" asked O'Rell uncomfortably.

"Byron told me quite a lot," said June. "I didn't know how much of it was so."

"Didn't he tell you that we—that he—"

"He told me yesterday afternoon that he was going to stay in town for a fraternity dinner, and he told me just now that he'd brought his old friend Mark O'Rell home to breakfast. Oh, he's told me a lot about you, Mr. O'Rell; but—"

"He asked us all home for breakfast," said O'Rell. "Mrs. Blish, let me introduce Miss Lockwood and Miss Laird."

"So charmed!" said June, with poison in her voice. "Do they belong to the fraternity, too?"

"No—we met them at a dance," said O'Rell.

"Byron didn't tell me he was going to a dance. You'll excuse me if I seem surprised. If you ever get married, Mr. O'Rell, remember this piece of advice—never surprise your wife. The best husbands don't do it."

If he ever got married! Evidently Byron hadn't told all. However, Mark saw his duty plain before him.

"Don't blame Byron, Mrs. Blish. I took him to the dance, and there we met these friends of mine. And he asked us—"

"Never mind," said Lorna coldly. "We won't impose on you, Mrs. Blish. If Mr. O'Rell was the only guest you expected, Mr. O'Rell is the only guest you'll have. Good morning!"

"Oh, don't go away," June protested. "Not before breakfast. Really, I wouldn't turn a dog away—I mean, that is, I'm charmed to see you. There isn't a restaurant in Oceanmere, so I'll give you something to eat before you go; only you'll have to wait a little while. I let the maid go yesterday afternoon, so I'll have to get breakfast myself."

"Let us help you," Lorna proposed.

"Oh, no, thank you! You're very kind, but I never like to have anybody else fussing around my kitchen. Wouldn't you ladies like to go upstairs and fix your hair before breakfast? I'm sorry to have to take you to the maid's bathroom, but Byron's taking a shower in the other."

She led the way upstairs. As Lorna passed O'Rell, she whispered in his ear:

"So this is the good sport and the clinging vine! Twenty years ago I'd have walked out into the cold gray dawn, but

there's nothing like the pangs of hunger to silence false pride."

"Don't take her too seriously," said O'Rell. "Anybody can have a grouch if three unexpected guests come in just after the cook has been fired."

Nevertheless, he reflected, when he was left alone, that Marjorie would undoubtedly have met this situation with far better grace. If she had had a grouch, she would have hidden it. A husband who brought three tousled and disreputable strangers home to breakfast, without warning, might have heard from Marjorie later; but to the guests she would have been the perfection of courtesy. Marjorie, in effect, was a good sport. Whatever happened, she would remain calm.

O'Rell would have given ten years of his life to have been able to sit down to breakfast with Marjorie, instead of these other women; but things had happened overnight that made it seem possible that he might never sit down to breakfast with Marjorie again. He could shake off the ridiculous accusation of abduction, but how could he explain that kiss?

June came clattering down the stairs and rejoined him.

"I hope you appreciate what I'm doing for you," she said sharply. "Yes, for you—not for Byron. A man who would treat his wife like this doesn't deserve much consideration, does he? Oh, well, that's married life, Mr. O'Rell. Take warning! But I knew you didn't know any better, being a bachelor; and since they were friends of yours, I wouldn't turn them out."

"They're perfectly respectable girls," said O'Rell.

"Well, of course, I wouldn't be understood as denying that; but you can understand that a girl who might be all right to know before you were married isn't all right to ask home to breakfast without telling your wife. Did anybody see you come into the house?"

"I hope not."

"Amen," said June pleasantly. "Oh, you don't know what it's like to have a husband who says he's just going out to meet a few old friends, and then comes back God knows when, dragging God knows who with him! I don't mean you, Mr. O'Rell. I've heard so much about you that I feel you're almost an old friend of mine, too. Take a friend's advice—never get married. It's hell!"

"My dear Mrs. Blish! Byron's devoted to you. He's the prince of good fellows—"

"Yes, I know all about Byron. Good company—funny little ways—all that sort of thing. They aren't funny when you live with them. I can see, Mr. O'Rell, that you're the type of man women go crazy about. Probably they're always throwing themselves at you; but don't ever let one of them marry you. You see what married life is. Oh, I suppose Byron means well, but he lets you get him pie-eyed and drag him out to disreputable dances and pick up hussies like these. Oh, well! You men—you're all alike. Don't think that I mean any of this personally, Mr. O'Rell, but it's rather a shock to a girl who has been brought up in a respectable way to find the sort of company her husband keeps. However, your friends shall never know from me that they're not welcome. *Noblesse oblige*, you know. Excuse me while I start the coffee."

Presently he heard her clattering about in the kitchen. A moment later Lorna and Irene tiptoed downstairs and came softly into the living room.

"Nobody shall know from her what she thinks of us," said Lorna. "Nobody, that is, in the next county."

"Did you hear her?"

"Did we hear her? If there's anybody in town that didn't hear her, they must sleep hard. And the tragedy is that I need that breakfast; only I expect she's putting arsenic in the coffee. Irene, we'd better exit."

"I don't feel as if I could stir a step," said Irene, slumping wearily into a cushioned armchair. "Not without something to eat!"

"There's much in that," said Lorna. "After all, if she can repress her emotions to the extent of getting breakfast, I can repress mine enough to eat it. *Noblesse oblige*."

More steps on the stairs, and Byron appeared before them—Byron bathed and shaved and wrapped in a dressing gown.

"Lorna—Marky—Irene!" he declaimed tragically. "I heard it all. Never did I dream that my friends would be so insulted in my own house; but that's marriage. Bites the hand that feeds her—"

June heard him from the kitchen, and came in to confront him with an accusing—

"Byron, you've been in that California port!"

"And what if I have?" he retorted indignantly. "Don't I need something to pick me up when you meet me with contumely, instead of a good morning kiss? When you insult my guests to their faces? Woman, leave me to myself!"

He folded his arms with dignity and went back up the stairs. They heard him open a door. There were mysterious noises; then June suddenly ran after him.

"Byron! Byron!"

A tremendous crash above them, and a section of plaster in the living room ceiling fell with a clatter, leaving a bare triangle of lath. Lorna softly put on her raincoat, and picked her pointed white cap out of the heap of dust and plaster fragments that had fallen on it. Then she looked up with a startled cry.

"Ye girls from the golden West!"

Above her, on the laths, was a slowly widening red stain. Irene looked, and screamed.

"My God, she's killed him!"

"And here goes a material witness," said Lorna. "Anybody that cares to can stay and meet the coroner; but as for me, I'm off right now!"

Through the open French windows she stepped out into the garden. After a moment Irene followed her.

XXII

O'RELL stared in horror at the stained and dripping laths. A crimson drop splashed on his wrist, and he shuddered. Then he looked at it in surprise, smelled it, and laughed hysterically. Even if Byron had been drinking, his blood would hardly smell of port.

He ran out into the garden and caught the girls as they were passing out into the street.

"Wait!" he cried. "Nobody's killed. They've only smashed a cask of wine."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Lorna. "I've got enough felonies on my hands already. Despite your reassuring words, my friend, I'm through with this party. There's a jinx on it. I'd rather wait an hour for breakfast than go back and listen to the love birds coo. Come on, Irene!"

"Wait till I get my suit case," said O'Rell, "and I'll go with you."

"Not you," Lorna told him. "Your object in life, at present, is to keep out of sight of Irene till I've squared you with the police and the infuriated uncle."

"So it is," he admitted; "but where shall I go?"

"Go where you please," said Lorna, "so long as you keep away from us. Go out and lie down on the beach, if you want to; but don't hang around here. The fewer people see you and Irene together, the better."

She was manifestly right. He watched the two as they hurried away down the street. He saw a respectable citizen, sprinkling his lawn, stare at them in amazement and run to call his wife. He reflected that his own appearance was none too appetizing. Anybody who saw him at Byron's garden gate would be likely to wonder whether he was a belated burglar or an early hobo.

Nor was there any place where he could go. Oceanmere was nothing but a residential settlement. It had no parks, no hotels, no restaurants—nothing but a beach, which would soon be alive with citizens taking their morning dips. Certainly the Blish home was not a very attractive refuge, but it was the only place where he might be able to spend the next few hours in peace. Reluctantly he returned to the house.

Nobody was in sight downstairs, and there were no sounds from above. He surmised that June had found her guests gone, and had resumed her interrupted sleep. The suspicion became stronger as the minutes passed with no further sound.

By now O'Rell himself was nodding. He hadn't stayed up all night since the war, and he wasn't used to it. The misadventures of the night had kept him awake thus far, and the shock of what he had seen in the newspaper had startled him; but now at last his weary body was demanding a rest.

Why shouldn't he go to sleep? After all, he was Byron's guest; and June, if she hadn't exactly welcomed him, had at least made it clear that she regarded him with more favor than his companions. Even an hour's rest would refresh him and make him better able to meet the troubles that were coming later in the day.

Still, it wouldn't do to lie down here in the living room. June might come downstairs before he woke, and he didn't like to think of her finding him stretched out on the floor or the couch. Yet he couldn't stay awake much longer.

Stealthily he began to look about him—

looked, finally, out on the porch. There, sheltered from the street and from the sunlight by a wall of climbing roses, was a bench. He could lie down there with the certainty of being undisturbed till somebody came out on the porch; and there was at least an even chance that that somebody would be Byron.

To be sure, the bench looked rather hard and uninviting; but there was a remedy for that. O'Rell opened his suit case and took out the quilt.

"I've been carrying this thing around all night," he reflected, "and now at last it seems likely to serve some good purpose. I hope it isn't time for another victim to die under it!"

Spreading it out on the bench, he lay down on it. He shifted uneasily, felt about with his hand, and finally sat up. There was a hard lump in the quilt—a lump that couldn't be massaged out.

He felt the fabric curiously. Then he ripped off the medallion, delved into the eider down—and stared in pitiable bewilderment at a mass of diamonds.

For a few minutes Mark O'Rell was convinced that he had gone crazy. He hadn't left Marjorie and come into town alone. He hadn't gone to a dance, or been thrown out of a wrecked taxicab, or come home to breakfast at an inhospitable house, or been accused of abducting Irene. He had merely gone insane, and this was the latest form of his delusions.

On the whole, this was a rather comforting explanation—a good deal simpler and less bothersome than admitting the actuality of all his troubles. But it wouldn't work. He knew that he was sane, and awake; and his quilt—the worthless relic that he had been dragging around with him for the sake of squaring himself with the family—was full of diamonds.

He hunted feverishly through the eider down, brought the sparkling stones out one by one, and counted them—thirty-two. Whose diamonds were they? Not O'Rell's; not Aunt Cordelia's; not Bill Corliss's, certainly.

Though any one in Mother McCurdy's could have got into the white wardrobe as easily as he, it seemed unlikely that anybody, after hiding diamonds in the quilt, would leave it in the wardrobe. Also, it was not impossible that whoever had left these diamonds there might have gone back to look for them; and, not finding them,

might even now be hunting for them with some zeal.

"I may not be crazy yet," O'Rell reflected; "but if I try to figure this thing out I soon shall be!"

A huge yawn—diamonds or no diamonds, he simply couldn't stay awake much longer. Nobody had disturbed the quilt since he got it. Neither Blish nor Lorna nor Irene could ever have had such gems as these. Another yawn—the problem was too much for him. He was dying for sleep.

He placed the diamonds carefully in his handkerchief, tied up the corners securely, and thrust the bundle into the inner pocket of his vest.

"If they're still there when I wake up," he reflected, "then I'm not crazy; and maybe I can think this thing out. If they're not there, I'm that much to the good. I've got troubles enough without this!"

He stretched out on the bench and pulled his quilt around him. Thirty seconds later he was asleep.

Lorna and Irene stared at each other, before the ticket window, in helpless dejection. Two tickets to New York cost two dollars and twelve cents, and they had only one eighty-five.

"Maybe we could get to Long Island City," Lorna suggested disconsolately, "and beat our way across the ferry."

"Maybe we could go back," said Irene, "and borrow some more from Mr. and Mrs. Blish."

Lorna shook her head.

"Byron's broke, and I have a feeling that Mrs. Blish would just as soon let us walk. Let's see what we can do." And to the ticket agent: "When's the next train to Long Island City?"

"Nine twenty-nine."

"Ouch!" said Lorna. "It's only seven thirty. I shall starve to death in two hours more!"

"Train east in ten minutes," the agent suggested.

"East! I'm about as far east as I care to go, thank you. Me for God's own country—the great free, open spaces of the West Forties! However—happy thought, Irene! Where does this train east go from here?"

"Mallard Club's the next stop; then Amityville—"

"Saved!" said Lorna. "I know half a dozen people spending the summer at the

bungalows at the Mallard, and forty more who are going down there for the carnival this afternoon. What's the fare to the Mallard?"

"Forty cents."

"Then we'd have enough left to buy something to eat," said Irene.

"We won't need it. Irma Doreen and Mary Alexander would never refuse me breakfast just because I came out in last night's costume. For that matter, they'd lend us clothes to go back to town. Keep up your spirits for another quarter of an hour, little cousin, and we'll eat!"

Somebody was shaking O'Rell's shoulder. Slowly and reluctantly he came back to wakefulness, yawned, and looked up into June's face.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"Sleeping," said O'Rell. "At least I was."

"But I thought you'd gone. Byron upset a cask of port, and it went through the ceiling and made a terrible mess. By the time I'd finished mopping it up he'd gone to sleep. I thought I'd better come down and entertain you, anyway; and then I found that you'd gone."

"Well," said O'Rell doggedly, "I came back, and then you'd gone."

"There didn't seem to be any reason for staying up," said June; "so I went back to bed and finished my nap. Have you had breakfast?"

"Breakfast?" he repeated, in the tone of the wolf pack sighting its prey. "No, I haven't had breakfast. What time is it?"

"Quarter past eleven. Would you like some breakfast?"

"I don't want to put you out."

"I haven't had mine," said June; "and now that you've got rid of those women, my appetite's better. Would you like some strawberries, and bacon and eggs, and popovers, and coffee?"

"Would I? My dear Mrs. Blish, you've saved a life!"

June looked at him critically.

"You need a shave," she said, "and probably a shower. You can do both while I'm getting breakfast. Your collar looks pretty far gone—can you wear one of Byron's?"

She seemed a trifle domineering, but he was ready to submit to anything if only she would feed him.

"I think so," he said. "His neck is pretty fat."

"All right," said June. "Breakfast in twenty minutes."

"Is Byron up?"

"No, Byron isn't up. He's gone into the silences; but if you don't mind having breakfast with me—"

By that time O'Rell would have been willing to breakfast with Aunt Cordelia.

As he turned toward the door, he fingered furtively in his vest pocket. The diamonds were still there. Unhappily, then, he was sane.

He felt a good deal saner an hour later—bathed, shaved, brushed up, and well fed, smoking one of June's cigarettes as they lingered at the breakfast table.

"You know," she said, "I feel as if I'd known you for ages. No trouble to break the ice, or anything like that."

"I've broken so many things in the last couple of days," he said darkly, "that a little ice means nothing!"

"What are your plans for the day?" she inquired.

"Ah!" said O'Rell. "I thought I'd make it a day of rest. Why?"

"You may have heard," said June, "that there's a big water carnival at the Mallard Club, down the shore. I've been looking forward to it for weeks. Byron knew that. He knew I expected him to take me; but he couldn't take anybody anywhere today. He's lost to the world. That's marriage for you, Mr. O'Rell! He spends all night carousing with *Pierrots* and Spanish cavaliers, and then can't stay awake to oblige his wife. I wish you'd go to the carnival with me."

"I?"

"Why not," said June, "if you've nothing else to do? I won't go by myself; but I've been counting on it. It seems to me that as long as you took Byron out on this riotous party, and wore him out so he can't go, you owe me a substitute."

It certainly would be more pleasant to spend the afternoon at the Mallard Club than to linger here in this atmosphere of marital hatred—O'Rell could see that. He had to spend the afternoon somewhere; he couldn't go home till Lorna and Irene had explained to the police. Also, he owed a real debt of gratitude to the woman who had fed him; but there were objections.

"Can't you swim?" demanded June impatiently.

"Certainly I can swim, but I haven't a bathing suit."

"I can find a suit for you at the club. Do you know, Mr. O'Rell, that you have a very good figure? You can't imagine what an annoyance it is to me to have to trail along a bathing beach with that fat little billiken upstairs!"

She was frank enough. O'Rell decided that he, too, would be frank.

"I'd like to go to the carnival with you, Mrs. Blish; but the truth is I haven't a cent with me. I was waiting to see Byron again, because I'll have to borrow car fare back to town."

"You won't need money," said June. "I'll sign the checks."

He surrendered. It seemed wrong, somehow, to be a dependent on a woman—particularly a woman whom he had never seen till this morning; but he was going to have to be dependent on somebody.

June looked him over critically.

"That collar of Byron's fits you all right. Your clothes need pressing, but I guess they'll get by. That straw hat—no!"

"But it's the only hat I have with me," he protested.

"It's got a hole in the crown and mud on the brim," said June. "I wouldn't be seen with it. Anyway, I'll drive you over in the car; so you won't need a hat. Now I'll write a little note and leave it where Byron will be sure to see it, and then we'll go. No thanks to Byron that I'm not spending Sunday at home!"

XXIII

A LANCELIKE beam of sunlight shot into the bungalow window, crept along the bed where Marjorie O'Rell lay asleep, and fell at last on her eyes. She stirred uneasily, stretched herself, yawned, then opened her eyes and looked at her wrist watch. Half past ten!

She sat up hastily and looked down at the pillow beside her. Mark wasn't there. It was the first morning in nearly a year that Mark hadn't been there. And then she remembered where she was—remembered what she had done the evening before; and the more she thought about it, the less she liked it.

The bungalow was empty, apparently; but a sound of splashing and laughter from the lake, a hundred feet away, told her that the others were already enjoying themselves. She and Hollingsworth had been

the last to come in last night. Marjorie recalled, now, that they had sat up and talked till nearly four o'clock. No wonder she had overslept!

Hollingsworth! Marjorie frowned. She had let the flirtation take its course—at first out of pique at Mark's behavior, later out of sheer devilry, as she began to see that it rather scandalized the others. For months they had all been saying that her devotion to Mark was too abandoned to endure. Now that it seemed to be weakening for the first time, they had regarded her less with cynical amusement than with a somewhat resentful irritation.

It occurred to her that perhaps she and Mark had been a model couple in more ways than one. In a set where most of the marriages had developed, or degenerated, into business arrangements for raising children, or partnerships for pleasure seeking, or a state of boredom tempered by flirtations, people had looked on her and Mark as a sort of prize exhibit, a living proof that the dreams of the honeymoon were not always vain imaginings. They didn't think it would last, but they hoped that it would last, and hoped rather desperately. Her conduct last night, then, had cracked what must for most of them have been the last illusion.

From that point of view, Marjorie felt that she had done a wicked thing. In other ways it hadn't been particularly wicked, though she concluded, thinking it over, that it had been wicked enough. She had let Hollingsworth hold her hands in his. His hands were big and strong, like Mark's, but rough and hairy, as Mark's distinctly were not. The thought of those long red hairs made her shiver this morning.

She couldn't raise any particular objection to Hollingsworth's conduct. He liked her, evidently—and that was pleasant; and while she hadn't exactly liked him, she had liked his enthusiasm for her. He had behaved well enough, on the whole. He had, to be sure, tried to kiss her good night, but she had probably let him think she would like that; and when he saw that she didn't like it, he had apologized with a proper display of contrition.

To be sure, he had rather commiserated her, evidently regarding her as the victim of a cold and selfish husband; but the jokes of the others about Mark's absence had been sufficient excuse for that. No wonder Hollingsworth had the impression that

Mark systematically neglected her, if he didn't actually abuse her; and Marjorie honestly admitted that she had said next to nothing to correct that impression. In fact, in her wrathful mood of the afternoon and early evening she had rather looked on it in that way herself. When Hollingsworth had patted her hand, and called her a poor little girl, and told her that he'd do anything in the world—anything—to make things easier for her, he had done little more than make the natural response to the general atmosphere.

When she remembered this, Marjorie despised herself more thoroughly than she had ever done in her life.

What was Mark's offense? That he had been thoughtless—no more. True, it was the first time he had ever been thoughtless in that particular way; but instead of regarding that as a mitigation of his offense, she had somehow felt that it made it worse. He must have been punished enough merely by finding her note on the dressing table. She ought to have been there to watch him read it—hiding somewhere, to slip out on him and tell him it wasn't true; but she had left him alone all night—left him to get his own breakfast.

Somehow the picture of Mark awkwardly fussing about among pots and pans, making himself some coffee and eating cold rolls—she was sure he wouldn't know enough to warm them—brought the tears to her eyes; and she sprang out of bed and began to dress hurriedly. She would get Zella to send one of the cars back to Wynwood, and she would go back to Mark. She felt that she ought to do the whole twenty miles on her knees; but that would take too much time. If he had had to get his own breakfast, she could at least get him a compensating lunch.

The party, it had been decided last night, was to continue all day, and perhaps through the holiday on the following day. Marjorie hadn't objected when Zella and the others came to that conclusion, for she was certain that this morning Mark would call up and ask if he couldn't join them. Last night she had rather rejoiced in the prospect of his coming sheepishly back to her, properly chastened by her absence; but now she thought of it with horror.

There was deeper horror, a moment later, in the realization that it was half past ten, and he hadn't called up. Perhaps he didn't mean to call up. Perhaps he wasn't com-

ing. Perhaps he was going to wait grimly in the desolate home for the wandering wife to come back.

For the first time Marjorie began to feel some alarm. Mark had never been really angry with her, but she had once or twice seen him angry at other people, and he had seemed to her rather terrible at those moments. Would he act like that to her?

Well, she deserved it. She might as well go home and face the worst. The truth was that she was so lonely without Mark that she would rather be with him, even if he were angry at her, than stay out here without him. She finished dressing, put on her hat, threw her nightgown and toothbrush into her shiny black overnight bag, and went out to find Zella.

She found her soon enough. Zella was on the porch, reading the morning newspaper. Some of the others were in the lake. Howard Burbidge, Zella's husband, was striding nervously up and down the lawn, with a pipe in his mouth. Hollingsworth was out in the hammock, staring out over the water. There was a queer atmosphere all about, as if some terrible misfortune had happened.

As Marjorie came out on the porch, Zella started up suddenly and hurried toward her, with apprehensive eyes. Then she saw the hat and the bag, and seemed rather relieved—as relieved as the heirs might feel when the will is read and they know the worst at last.

"So you know!" Zella groaned. "You poor dear girl! I've been worrying all the morning about trying to tell you. We're all so—so—"

"What's the matter?" said Marjorie briskly. "Has—has anything happened to Mark?"

"Then you don't know?" Zella screamed. "Oh, my dear Marjorie! Well, perhaps it isn't so—"

"What is it? Tell me, quick. Is he hurt?"

"Oh, Marjorie! I—it's worse than that."

"Not dead?" said Marjorie, quite clearly, but with a gray, drawn face.

"Worse than that!"

"Zella, you're an idiot! Nothing could be worse than that. What is it?"

"We saw it in the paper, dear, but we didn't wake you—"

Marjorie ran down the porch and picked up the paper that Zella had dropped. And

there she saw it—"Schoolgirl flees with principal in love pact," and all the amazing story that followed. She read it slowly and carefully, and then threw the newspaper down with a sudden fierce gesture.

"What rubbish! You don't mean to say you believe it?"

"Marjorie, we—we're absolutely killed over it, of course, but—"

"What a lot of idiots you are! Of course it's nonsense. Mark asked me to go to town with him."

"But he knew you were engaged for the afternoon," said Zella doubtfully. "Of course I don't want to seem to be arguing, but, Marjorie, it does look—"

"But he came home last night."

Zella looked at her in silence.

"What is it?" said Marjorie sharply. "Don't stand there like a pyramid—I mean a sphinx. What's the matter?"

"He didn't go home. He hasn't been home at all."

"How do you know?"

"Your Aunt Cordelia called up. She told me that she went over to your house this morning to console you, and she found it locked. She—she climbed in through the kitchen window—"

"Aunt Cordelia!"

Marjorie's brain was clear enough to realize, even in all this devastating horror, that this pilgrimage of an elderly lady, weighing a hundred and seventy pounds, through a window three feet from the ground must in some obscure and perverse way have been inspired by love for her.

"Yes—she said she scratched herself rather badly, but she got in; and Mark hadn't been home at all. Then somebody told her you were out here, so she called up. She's telegraphed to your father and mother in Atlantic City, but nobody has found Mark."

"The whole thing is utterly absurd," said Marjorie. "I don't believe a word of it. I know Mark!"

"I used to think I knew Howard," Zella sighed.

"Well, Mark isn't Howard. Probably he went off with some of his old friends, and he'll come back this afternoon."

"The paper spoke of lynching—"

"There aren't enough people in Wynwood to lynch Mark! Zella, can you spare a car? I'm going back home. There's one thing in this story that even you will have to admit is wrong—I'm not prostrate."

Zella went out to tell Howard, and Marjorie thought it over. It was absurd, it was false—she hadn't the least doubt of that. She was sure that even the story about the embrace in the darkness was a mistake. She would find Mark.

Then she remembered that she didn't have any money, and that there was very little in the house. Aunt Cordelia wouldn't have any, and her father couldn't be home till late to-night. Marjorie didn't know just what might happen; but whatever it was, she would need money—perhaps a good deal of money.

She looked out toward the hammock, where Hollingsworth was watching her intently. She ran to him. He hopped up as she approached, with an entirely proper air of self-effacing grief.

"My dear Mrs. O'Rell!" Last night he had called her "Marjorie," or "little girl." "I don't need to tell you how deeply I'm grieved. If there's anything I can do to serve you—"

"Do you really mean that?"

"From the bottom of my heart."

"Then please let me have all the money you have with you."

"All of it?" said Hollingsworth unsteadily. "Why—"

"All of it," said Marjorie grimly. "Howard Burbidge will lend you car fare to Boston."

"But I happen to have a good deal with me," Hollingsworth explained. "Nearly eight hundred dollars. You wouldn't want all that?"

"I may need that much, or more," said Marjorie. "I might have to—to bail Mark out, or something."

Hollingsworth was sorely distressed. He had brought so much money along because Howard Burbidge knew where some really wonderful Scotch could be obtained—at a hundred dollars a case, cash; no checks accepted. But Marjorie's clear gray eyes were looking into his. With a gesture of magnificent sacrifice, he drew out his wallet and counted out the money.

"If there's anything else—"

"I think not," said Marjorie briskly. "If Zella can spare me the little car, I'll drive it in, and send it back by somebody from the garage. Excuse me to the others, won't you? I'm in a hurry."

And Hollingsworth stood with hanging jaw and watched her walk out of his life with his eight hundred dollars.

Howard was solicitous, and wanted to drive her in; but Marjorie said she wouldn't take him away from the party. She wanted them all to forget about her, she added, and go on amusing themselves. This was only an absurd misunderstanding that would soon be cleared up.

She knew well enough that Howard's reluctance was chiefly due to the fear that she would drive fast, and without too much care—that, in short, she was likely to smash the car. And precisely because she intended to drive as swiftly as the car could go, without stopping to worry about the hazards of the road, she meant to go alone. She was in a hurry!

So she drove away alone; and she made the twenty miles of rough hill road back to Wynwood in less than half an hour. It was rather a blessing to have to keep her mind on the car and the road, for it didn't seem that this thing could be cured by thinking about it. Everybody was stupid, that was all. As soon as she could find Mark, it would all be cleared up.

She left the car at the garage and almost ran home. Aunt Cordelia came to the door before she rang, her face disfigured with court-plaster.

"My dear child! Marjorie, as one who knows, I understand that words mean little in such a time as this; but be sure the whole family is standing behind you. We are all, every one of us, just as grieved and heartbroken as you are—"

"I'm not heartbroken," said Marjorie, "except because you all act like a lot of idiots. Was it you that said all these things to the reporter?"

"It was the least I could do," said Aunt Cordelia, "to make it clear how we all felt."

"If you all feel like that," said Marjorie coolly, "I never want to speak to one of you again. You don't mean to say you believe this?"

"Marjorie, are you still blind?"

"No, but everybody else seems to be."

"The evidence is overwhelming," said Aunt Cordelia sadly.

"It's ridiculous! Even Gabe Gooch can't really believe that it proves anything because they went in on the same train."

"But they were seen embracing—"

"Somebody else was kissing this girl, and gossip women didn't take the trouble to look straight. They said it was in the dark."

"You don't know it all," said Aunt Cordelia. "Hinton Atlee was here this morning. He was very much distressed about it. He seemed to feel that if he had only done his duty, it would never have happened; but I told him that when a man has made up his mind to desert his wife—"

"What else did Mr. Atlee say?" Marjorie interrupted. "Didn't he see Mark at the dinner?"

"Yes, he did," said Aunt Cordelia with a note of triumph. "He said that Mark and another man were seen leaving the place together after the dinner, and were heard saying that they were going out with some wild women."

Marjorie was rather stunned by this. The whole thing was still untrue—impossible; but there did seem to be a good many things that would have to be explained away.

"Who was the other man?" she demanded.

"Now what was the name? Dear me! Cousin Hinton told me, but it slipped my mind. Fish, or Plish, or something like that."

"I remember," said Marjorie. "Blish—Byron Blish. Mark spoke of him the other night. All right; we'll look up Byron Blish. Where's the telephone book?"

She looked through the big book in vain, with Aunt Cordelia heaving an occasional sigh, motivated half by pity for Marjorie's blindness and half by indignation at her ingratitude.

"Probably he lives in a boarding house, or a shady hotel," said Aunt Cordelia.

Marjorie was hunting in a last desperate hope through the suburban telephone directory. Presently she straightened up with the trace of a smile.

"Byron Blish lives on Long Island," she said. "His number is Oceanmere 337 R."

So it happened that Blish was startled by the ringing of a telephone bell as he sat up in bed and read over and over again, with eyes still drowsy, the message that he had found pinned to his pyjamas when he woke up toward noon.

Since you seem to have no care for your plighted word or your wife's happiness, I've gone for an outing with somebody who understands a woman's nature. I'll come back some time.

June had left him. She said that she would come back some time. Well, Byron

would see about that! Meanwhile, who was the man?

As he thought this over, the telephone rang again, and he stumbled out of bed and downstairs. On the settle in the hall he found a shattered and broken straw hat, which certainly hadn't been there when he went upstairs—a hat that seemed strangely familiar, that bore in the lining the gilt initials, "M. O'R."

Byron saw it all, and ran to the telephone in the hope that somehow the guilty pair might have been intercepted. The woman's voice that came over the wire didn't seem familiar.

"Is this Mr. Blish?"

"Yes."

"Is Mr. O'Rell there?"

"Who?"

"Mr. O'Rell—Mr. Mark O'Rell. Don't you know him?"

"Know him?" said Blish. "I should say I do know him. The monster has wrecked my home!"

XXIV

"WHAT's that?" cried Marjorie.

"I say he has wrecked my home—fled with my wife."

"Oh, no!" Marjorie groaned. "That can't be possible!"

"Who is this talking?" Blish demanded.

"This is a—a friend of Mr. O'Rell."

"I called him 'friend' once," said Byron vindictively. "I brought him home to breakfast with me. My wife gave me hell for doing it, and then, as soon as my back was turned, she ran off with him; but I'll get him! The world is henceforth too small for him and me!"

"But are you sure?" Marjorie cried.

No answer; nor, though she tried for five minutes more, could she get any further response. She couldn't know that Byron had left the receiver hanging on the cord as he went upstairs to put on his clothes and start the search.

At last she gave it up and turned away.

"What is it, Marjorie?" said Aunt Cordelia eagerly.

"No news," said Marjorie dully, "except that Mr. Blish says Mark has run off with his wife."

"Oh, Marjorie, I told you those masterful men had an awful power over women! We all love a caveman."

"Nonsense! Even you, Aunt Cordelia, will admit that this can't all be true. If

he's run off with this Laird girl, he can't have run off with Mrs. Blish."

"I don't know, my dear. There was Solomon, and Brigham Young."

"Well," said Marjorie, "I'm not here to talk Bible history. Mark was at Oceanmere this morning, and I don't believe he's run off with anybody. I'm going to go down to Oceanmere and start looking from there."

"Not by yourself!"

"Yes," said Marjorie firmly, "by myself. You're going to stay here and answer the telephone; but if you say another word to reporters—"

"But you need some man to lean on in a time like this."

"I'll lean on Mark, when I find him."

"It's such a pity your father isn't here! He ought to be in on the seven fifty-two."

"I'm going on the twelve twenty."

"There's Cousin Felix."

"Cousin Felix," said Marjorie, "is an idiot. I begin to think that most of us Redmans are idiots. I'm going to Oceanmere by myself, and when I've found Mark I'll call you up and tell you."

She looked about her absently, then walked toward the door.

"Where are you going?" Aunt Cordelia demanded.

"Only to the kitchen. It just occurred to me that I hadn't had any breakfast."

Marjorie supposed that she ought to have been above breakfast in this crisis, but she had half an hour with nothing to do, and getting the meal kept her busy, after a fashion.

As she was drinking her coffee, the telephone rang again. Marjorie set down the cup and ran to the living room, but Aunt Cordelia had answered.

"And has the scoundrel been caught?" she was saying. "I see. Thank you so much. Good-by!"

"What is it?" Marjorie demanded.

"It was Gabe Gooch. He says the girl has been found. She's at the Mallard Club, down on Long Island."

"Alone?"

"Some woman is with her—he didn't know just who it was. It seems the girl's aunt and uncle went to New York this morning, to police headquarters; and Mr. Gooch is going to tell them right away. Then I suppose they'll go down and get her; but not a trace of Mark!"

"I'll find Mark," said Marjorie. "Isn't

the Mallard Club down on the South Shore? Maybe I can see this girl, too."

"He's probably deserted her," said Aunt Cordelia, "for his new paramour. Men are very fickle!"

"Aunt Cordelia," said Marjorie, "at last I begin to understand about Uncle Frederick."

Silence settled on the household after that.

At that very moment the traffic policeman at Jason's Corner was shepherding three sullen prisoners into the stuffy front parlor in the home of the justice of the peace. They sat down on a haircloth sofa, with the policeman and his gun on guard; and presently the justice came in. He had just come back from church; and though he had taken off his coat, he still wore the hard-boiled shirt that was part of his regular Sunday uniform. He was tucking a napkin in under his collar as he entered, and behind him a woman's voice squawked:

"Be quick about it, Henry! Dinner's on the table."

"No need to waste time on this bunch," said the policeman. "I timed 'em, judge. They were doin' nearly sixty miles."

The justice cleared his throat and looked at his three prisoners—Dan glowering under his gray cap, Al fidgeting uneasily, the chauffeur dully resigned.

"I'm going to give you men a lesson," the justice announced. "I know just the kind you are, every blamed one of you. As soon as you get outside the city limits you think you can go just as fast as you blamed please; but you can't. The speed limit of the village of Jason's Corner is fifteen miles an hour. It is not the principle of this court to fine the driver of a car and let off the men that made him break the law. I fine you—"

"Wait a minute, judge," said Al. "Let me tell you just one thing—we're chasin' a man that ran off with my wife."

"Hey?" the justice grunted.

"We certainly were," Al asserted. In the open doorway of the dining room he saw a large, gray-haired woman, her hands on her hips, listening intently. "I—I was called away from home on business last night, and when I got back I found she'd packed up and beat it with another fellow. My friend and I picked up their trail this morning. They were on their way to Oceanmere."

"Uh-huh!" the justice grunted. "There's lots of fast people live there."

"We got this car," said Al, "and started after them as quick as we could go. Your policeman stopped us. I suppose that's his business; but he admits himself that the taxi my wife was in was breakin' speed limits just as much as ours, only"—with a vicious glance at the policeman—"only it knocked him flat, and we had the decency to slow down when he flagged us. Now I leave it to you, judge," he ended craftily, "if you wouldn't break a few speed limits if somebody ran off with *your* wife!"

The justice cleared his throat. Then he glanced over his shoulder at the woman in the doorway.

"I certainly would," he said. "Of course, the law's the law—"

"Henry," said his wife sharply, "if you fine these gentlemen, you're connivin' at immorality—no more and no less; and dinner's gettin' cold."

"I find you guilty," said the justice hastily, "and suspend sentence. I hope you ketch the scoundrel and make an example out of him!"

"Well!" said Dan, as they climbed back into the taxi. "I hand it to you, Al, old

century plant. One idea every hundred years, but that one's a blossom!"

"Oh, I can handle the hicks," said Al proudly. "If we hadn't been in a hurry, likely I could have sold him some oil stock."

"All the same," said Dan, "we've lost the morning, and likely the rocks. Your wife's had time to change her clothes by now, and to put away what she found in the quilt."

"Then what do we do?" Al inquired, dejected.

"All I can see," said Dan thoughtfully, "is to go on to Oceanmere. If anybody saw that gang blow in, they wouldn't forget it. Maybe we can pick 'em up from there, and when we find 'em, Al, believe me, somebody is going to get drilled!"

"I got no gat," said Al, "but I certainly would like to take a poke at the fellow that run off with Lorna. The little guy, wasn't it, that was with her—the little fat fellow?"

"I didn't notice which one was with her," said Dan; "but it was the big fellow that carried the baggage."

"The bigger they are the harder they fall," said Al cheerfully. "Especially with a bullet in 'em!"

(To be concluded in the February number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

CALIFORNIA—A SONG IN EXILE

THE valleys voice a song for me—

A song that chants the praise

Of grain-filled field and fruit-hung tree

And hammock-swinging days.

For me the valleys voice a song—a simple sunshine song;

And saints join in the fond refrain, a soft-voiced Mission throng.

The rivers wind gold chains for me—

Gold chains of wondrous weight

That stretch from mountains to the sea,

Out through the Golden Gate.

For me the rivers wind gold chains—such fair, enchanting chains

Of sea-worn ships, and Argonauts, gold fever in their veins!

The hills hold out their hands to me—

Hands filled with flowers of home;

Dream flowers that woo the woodland bee

And fill its honeycomb.

To me the hills hold out their hands—their poppy-laden hands.

Is there a Californian here? "Yes!" Well, *he* understands!

Clarence Urmey

As the White Man Weds

THE STORY OF JOHN HAMILTON AND THE GIRL LOLITA OF
THE MOCTEZUMA

By Harry L. Foster

WHEN John Hamilton took the girl Lolita from her native village on the Moctezuma River, and carried her over the mountains to his mining camp in the San Angel Valley, his sole intention was to be a guardian to her. She was little more than a child, a half-breed child of the Mexican desert, and Hamilton had too much principle to marry a daughter of the wilderness, whom he could never take to his own country. For Hamilton, although a miner by profession, hated the bleak land in which he worked, and knew that some day he must return—alone—to civilization.

He first met the girl upon the banks of the Moctezuma, when he was coming out to take charge of the isolated San Angel silver mines.

He had found his way with difficulty over the long trail that leads from Hermosillo across the brown expanse of cactus and mesquite, and over the bleak, forbidding foothills of the Mexican Rockies to the isolated village of Suaqui; but here the trail divided. He paused in the center of the wide, shallow stream, looking about for some one who might direct him.

Across the river stood a group of mud dwellings. The bank was lined with native women, washing clothes in the river and pounding them clean upon the rocks, or filling deerskin sacks with the turbid water. They were homely women, dark-skinned and heavy, with the stolid features of their Aztec ancestors.

Hamilton's eye fell upon the girl Lolita, and rested there only because she was different from the others. Her tint was lighter, her figure more slender, her eyes larger, her cheek bones less prominent. She stood barefooted in the stream, beside a small burro laden with receptacles for water; but instead of filling them, she was engaged in

washing her long, black hair. The afternoon sun sparkled upon her silky tresses.

Hamilton urged his horse toward her, and accosted her in Spanish.

"Which trail leads to the San Angel?" he asked.

Seemingly lost in reverie, the girl had not observed him before. Now, as she glanced up, her eyes widened, and a flush of color suffused her bare throat. Smiling timidly, she pointed out the road. Then, in a panic of confusion, she wrapped her arms about the neck of her burro, and hid her face in the animal's ratty mane.

At the San Angel, when he finally arrived there, Hamilton made casual inquiry about the girl.

"Oho!" said Creighton, the assistant manager. "She belongs to the old hag that runs the village inn."

"But she looks half Spanish."

"Probably is. Her mother never kept a register in the hotel." Creighton grinned broadly at the manager. "If you're interested, the old lady'll sell her for two hundred dollars gold. Personally I think it's too darned much—in this country!"

Hamilton was not interested, and dropped the subject.

During the fourteen months that followed he scarcely gave the girl a thought. He had his hands full with the San Angel, with the problems of bringing machinery across the mountains on muleback, shipping out his bullion on burro trains guarded by troops of hired Mexican gunmen—all the many problems which confront the American miner in the far interior of a lawless country.

The San Angel mine was beyond the protection of the Mexican government, for the Moctezuma Valley was ruled by the Yaqui Indians, who tolerated the presence of the

miners only upon the payment of frequent gratuities. Hamilton resented this demand for tribute, yet his stockholders desired him to avoid trouble with the Indians; and so, from time to time, he loaded his peace offerings upon the backs of mules, and rode with an escort of his gunmen to the village of Suaqui, to meet the chief, Talmatcho.

It was only on these occasions that he saw Lolita.

Suaqui was a neutral village, for its inhabitants were neither full-blooded Yaquis nor full-blooded Mexicans. The meeting of the hostile factions took place at the inn kept by Lolita's native mother. The girl herself would bring out the huge earthenware jugs of mescal wherewith the gratuity and its resultant peace were celebrated.

Hamilton watched her with growing sympathy as she passed among these men of a rough country, whose respect for women was less than their regard for the mules of their pack train. She seemed to understand his pity, for while she ordinarily avoided the eyes of the banqueters as she filled their glasses, she would glance shyly at Hamilton, and smile.

Old Felipe, Hamilton's Mexican foreman, noticed this.

"The girl, she like you," he told Hamilton. "All the time she make the goo-goo eyes. Nevair she make the goo-goo eyes like that before!"

"She's only a youngster," said Hamilton.

Felipe shrugged his shoulders.

"She have fifteen years. She no is child. Very soon her mother, she sell the girl."

"Not to me," said Hamilton.

II

LATE in the evening, when both Yaquis and Mexicans had thoroughly primed themselves with the fiery mescal, the girl's Indian mother brought forth a guitar, and called upon Lolita to dance. It was manifestly the woman's scheme to exhibit her daughter's charms to prospective buyers.

The music was weird, barbaric. The dim light of a swinging oil lamp fell upon a sea of dark faces, and shone upon the cartridges bristling from leather belts crisscrossed over the shoulders of the natives. Lolita's dance was a strange, graceful series of motions, half Spanish, half Indian—a dance of the swift red deer that abound in the mesquite of the Sonora desert. Hamilton saw only her liteness and beauty; he did not understand that she was dancing for him.

Neither did the other men understand it. They saw only the warm flush of her cheeks, the grace of her slender ankles, and the swelling curve of her bare throat. They stared at her as they might have stared at the wanton women of a frontier town.

Talmatcho himself offered to buy the girl. Turning to Hamilton, the chief demanded that the tribute from the mines should be paid at once, that he might have gold wherewith to make his purchase. Hamilton saw the horror in the girl's eyes. Once in the desert he had seen the same horror in the eyes of a rabbit cornered by mongrel dogs; so he bought her himself, refusing tribute to the Yaqui.

His defiance of Talmatcho sobered the gathering. Hands fell upon the hilts of knives, and guns were drawn, but there was no fight. Talmatcho, expecting no such defiance, had come to the meeting with only a few of his men, and an Indian never fights when outnumbered.

"*Bueno!*" he said. His face, with its high cheek bones, its small, crafty eyes, and its cruel mouth, was scornful. "Tonight you can take the girl; but remember, *señor*, I am chief of all the Yaquis of the Moctezuma Valley. To-morrow I can crush you and your fellows and your mine and the girl—as I crush this thing!"

He picked up an earthenware cup, and crushed it to bits in his hand.

Hamilton carried the girl from the inn, and lifted her gently to his saddle before he mounted. Behind him, as he rode over the dark trail toward the San Angel, Felipe and his Mexicans were ominously silent, each thinking of the possible consequences of the American's act. Hamilton himself was troubled only about the girl.

"I shall be nothing more than a guard-ian," he said to himself.

Putting his arm around her, he straightened her to a more comfortable position in the saddle, with her head resting contentedly on his shoulder.

At the San Angel he turned the girl over to McPherson, the grizzly old shift boss. McPherson was noted as a woman hater. His housekeeper was an aged, weather-beaten squaw, deliberately selected because of her years and general unsuitability for romance. This household, Hamilton knew, would be the safest place for the girl.

McPherson did not relish the responsibility. He removed a clay pipe from its usual resting place in the middle of a spot-

ted gray beard, and made the one comment with which he habitually expressed his attitude toward the gentler sex:

"Hell fire!"

He called his housekeeper, however, and sent the girl away with her. Lolita glanced questioningly at Hamilton until he told her emphatically to go with the woman, whereupon she smiled and obeyed.

Then Hamilton assembled his half dozen American engineers and bosses, recounted his quarrel with the Yaquis, and outlined his plan of campaign.

"We'll have to fight," he said quietly; "but it's something I've been wanting to do ever since I became manager of this outfit. We have enough machine guns in the blockhouse, and enough dynamite in the arsenal to blow up the whole Yaqui tribe. The trouble with these Yaquis is that no one has ever faced them. The Mexican government never bothers them. The other miners make them presents, just as we did. We're going to fight!"

Together with his bosses, Hamilton spent the day in going over his mines and working out a plan of defense.

The San Angel diggings lay in the center of a ragged, bowl-shaped valley in the heart of the mountains—a group of gaping shafts beside a huge stone blockhouse, with its thatched laborers' quarters straggling out into the cactus growth of the desert. On all sides the country was broken and uneven, a hideous waste of sand and mesquite, undulating and scarred with the deep-cut beds of dry mountain streams. It reminded Hamilton of No Man's Land; and with the aid of two or three overseas men in his engineering force, he worked out an elaborate system of defense, which, if successful, should end the Indian problem.

Only Creighton criticized him for what he had done, and Creighton's objection was personal.

"My Lord!" he exclaimed. "You take a girl from the Yaquis, and invite them here to break up the mine and kill the whole bunch of us; and then you turn her over to the celebrated Scotch sphinx, who beats his own squaw every Thursday and Saturday afternoon just to prove that he isn't sentimental! My Lord, why didn't you turn her over to me?"

"Would you stick to her for any length of time?"

Creighton grinned.

"Why don't you stick to her yourself?"

Hamilton pointed toward the desert.

"Because I'm not willing to stick to this. Some day I'm going back home. She's a nice little youngster, and it wouldn't be fair. No, Creighton, when some fellow comes along who'll be good to her, and not run away at the end of six months—"

"Perhaps!" said the assistant manager.

Hamilton strode off toward his own cabin, to wash for supper. His temporary home was just beyond the laborers' dwellings—a crude shack built from the gnarled trunks of giant cactus, and surrounded by a natural garden of yucca plants, now in bloom with their white lily flowers. As he passed the last laborer's hut, and caught sight of his cabin, he stopped in surprise. From the tin pipe that extended above its thatched roof a thin wisp of bluish smoke was curling peacefully upward.

"What the devil?" he gasped.

Filled with a sudden suspicion, he ran forward through the yucca and opened the door. Inside, bending over the stove, proceeding in a matter-of-fact way with the cooking of supper, stood the girl Lolita.

III

For a moment Hamilton leaned against the door frame and stared at her in frank bewilderment.

The girl appeared conscious of his presence, but she did not look up. She was stirring the beans industriously, placing a frying pan upon the stove, and pouring dough into it, or seizing a hatchet to chop down a stick of mesquite that was too large for the firepot—all with the businesslike manner of one who belonged there, and who was performing an expected task.

"What are you doing here?" Hamilton demanded sternly, in Spanish.

"Preparing my master's supper."

She did not interrupt her work. Hamilton pulled out an empty dynamite keg which served him as a chair, and seated himself, to collect his thoughts.

As his eyes became accustomed to the shadows of the cabin, he began to notice changes. The cigarette butts had been swept from his floor. His rough wooden table had been covered with a towel. The blankets on his bed, which he had left in a tumbled mass, just as he crawled out of them, were tucked under the mattress along the sides and turned over at the head.

"My master's supper is now ready."

Automatically Hamilton moved his dyna-

mite keg to the table. Usually he ate at the blockhouse with the other bachelors, but he owned a stock of utensils, hitherto unused. Lolita had discovered them, and had removed their coating of dust. Now she came and stood beside him, intending to wait on him.

"Sit down," he commanded. "I want to talk to you." Then, remembering his manners, he rose, and held another dynamite keg for her. "How did you find my cabin?" he inquired, resuming his own place.

She smiled.

"The woman of McPherson brought me here. It was from her also that I borrowed the beans and the flour."

"But what right had you to do it?"

Her eyes clouded with innocent wonder.

"Was it not my duty?"

"Your duty?"

"Is it not a woman's duty to cook for her man?" She smiled again. "At first the woman of McPherson would not bring me. She said you were not my man. I told her that you were."

"The devil!" exclaimed Hamilton.

With mingled amusement and apprehension, he watched her eat. Her manners were the manners of the mule drivers who stopped at her mother's inn. She radiated such happiness and contentment that it was painful to disillusion her; but he saw that he must do so at once.

"Who told you I was your man?" he demanded.

"I have always known it. Even when I was a tiny girl I knew it. I am not stupid, like the other girls of my people, and I dream dreams. When I was a tiny girl I dreamed, and I saw the face of my man. It was a beautiful red face, with yellow hair on top. When I met you at the Moctezuma, I knew that you were my man!"

She spoke so confidently that Hamilton stared at her in amazement. She was wearing the same one-piece cotton garment she had worn when she danced at her mother's inn. It accentuated the womanly lines of her little bronze figure, but she talked as a child might talk. Hamilton saw that he must be harsh, even brutal, with the girl.

"See here!" he exclaimed. "I did not bring you here as my woman. I brought you here to save you from one you did not wish. When you are grown up, you shall be free to choose your man."

Her simplicity was maddening. "I am

grown up, and I have chosen." Then her eyes clouded with a terrible new thought. "Is it that my master has a wife, a woman of his own people, in his own country to the north?"

"No," he admitted.

"Well, then, why can I not be his woman? Am I ugly? Am I so dark as the other women of Suaqui? Am I fat and clumsy? Or perhaps my master does not like the beans?"

"You're only a child!"

She breathed deeply, and bent toward him.

"I have fifteen years. Are there not many girls of fifteen years in the village of Suaqui who carry children on their backs—the children of their men?"

Despite his effort to be stern, Hamilton could not repress a smile at her earnestness. Dropping his harsh manner, he spoke gently:

"Listen, girl. My home is in a city very far from here—a great city called New York, much larger than Suaqui. Its people are different from the people of Suaqui. Some day I must go back to them. I could not take you with me, for my people would not understand you."

Lolita stared at him, large drops forming in her eyes.

"I did not think of that," she said. "I thought we would live here forever and ever, as it was in the dream!"

She bent her head upon her tiny bare arms, and began to sob.

"The devil!" said Hamilton again. After looking at her foolishly for a moment, he walked over and stroked her silken black hair. "What other ridiculous things did you dream?" he asked.

She drew quickly away from him.

"It does not matter! They were not true! You do not wish to be my man!"

She rose to her feet, still sobbing, and, before he could stop her, ran out into the garden. For a second he looked after her, undecided. Then, filled with apprehension lest she might harm herself, he ran after her, calling her name. In the twilight he could see her cotton dress darting through the yucca.

"You little imp!" he muttered.

Suddenly he realized that she was running straight toward a cañon, where some mountain stream, now dried up, had cut a gash in the desert. Frightened, he dashed after her, tearing his way through the

thorny branches that barred the path. At the very edge of the precipice he caught her. She struggled to free herself, but he held her tight. Finally, ceasing to struggle, she looked into his face and smiled a teasing, mischievous smile.

"You wild Indian!" he breathed. "Why did you do this?"

She laid her head against his shoulder, as she had done when he carried her over the trail from Suaqui.

"My master did not want me. What else had I to live for?"

He picked her up in his arms, intending to carry her back to McPherson's cabin. Then he noticed that her legs and arms were scratched by the thorns.

"You poor little thing!" he exclaimed.

Suddenly she reached up and kissed him. Child though she was, her lips burned with the fire of her Spanish blood. He sought to push her away, but she gripped him with all her slender, wiry strength, and clung fast.

Around them the deepening twilight had softened the ugliness of the desert into a thing of beauty. The yucca lilies were fragrant. In the distance the rugged mountain crags stood out in shades of deep purple.

Hamilton glanced hesitantly down the street toward McPherson's home; then he carried the girl to his own cabin.

IV

WEEKS passed at the San Angel—long, anxious weeks spent in waiting for an enemy who failed to appear.

Pack trains crossing the long trail to civilization sometimes saw the blue smoke of a signal fire curling up from a distant mountain top; but Hamilton had taught his gunmen to travel with advance guard and rear guard, exploring the defiles for an ambush before they entered, and the Yaquis, evidently waiting for some opportunity when they might find the Mexicans less cautious, did not attack them.

Hamilton was not afraid of the Indians. His miners, trained daily in the use of machine guns and hand grenades—weapons which were sure to surprise the Yaquis—were showing increasing proficiency. More satisfactory still, they were losing the Mexican's traditional fear of the Yaquis. Imbibing some of the confidence of their chief, they were eagerly awaiting the day when they might put an end to the necessity of standing guard.

In the mines the rattle of steam drills and the creak of hoisting machinery still sounded as usual, and in the red glow of the smelter the ore ran sputtering in white-hot streams of molten wealth. Inevitably, however, Hamilton's policy of keeping a portion of the miners on watch was reducing the output of metal, and the manager was uneasy about this. He knew that presently his directors in New York would be inquiring as to the reason for this decrease in production.

Yet the matter which troubled Hamilton most during the long weeks at the San Angel was his relation with the girl Lolita. He was growing fond of her, he told himself, but it was only such a fondness as one might form toward a kitten or a puppy. He could not spend his entire life with her in the Sonora desert. In the light of day the huge, bleak, barren expanse lost the beauty it had held for him on the fateful night when Lolita first gave herself into his keeping. The monotony of the dreary landscape once more appalled him.

He knew that the half-breed girl could never adapt herself to the ways of his own people. He proved this by sending to Hermosillo for a wardrobe for her. Felipe brought it on the pack train. In a one-piece cotton garment Lolita was graceful and natural; in a tailor-made suit and shoes she was awkward, self-conscious, ridiculous. She would look at the pictures of actresses in Hamilton's old magazines, and try to ape them, but her performance was only a burlesque.

McPherson came to the cabin, took one look at her, and walked out, repeating:

"Hell fire!"

Creighton remained to watch and grin.

"Just picture yourself walking down Broadway with her," he said.

Lolita saw that they were discussing her, and inquired what they were saying. Hamilton lied to her.

"We were saying that you are much more beautiful than the ladies of the pictures," he told her.

He prided himself on the fact that he had never deceived her, and he regretted the lie, but he could not hurt her feelings. She smiled delightedly, and pirouetted about the cabin, walking with difficulty in the unaccustomed shoes.

"I like the way they squeak," she said, delighted. "They make much more noise than even my master's shoes!"

Then she ran to him and kissed him. She no longer approached him with timidity, but with a confident air of ownership. His khaki shirt, open at the neck, she buttoned carefully, straightened his wide-flowing tie. Then she took a cigarette from his pocket, placed it in his mouth, and lighted it. To these attentions Hamilton submitted good-naturedly; he liked them, and the realization that he liked them troubled him.

Creighton understood.

"You don't feel quite so conscientious now, do you?" he drawled.

Hamilton bit his lip.

"I don't know. I warned her in the beginning that it could not last. I haven't really deceived the girl. I try not to think of the future."

Creighton nodded.

"I've been through the mill several times. You're kind of satisfied, while it lasts; but when you get ready for a trip home, you suddenly remember that she eats with her knife, and that sort of thing."

Once dressed like the white ladies of the magazine illustrations, Lolita seemed to feel vastly superior to the other women of the camp. She did not neglect her duties as a housewife; but when Hamilton was away at work she would go down to the well, from which the squaws carried water to their homes, and while they stood there barefooted, filling their earthenware jars, she would display her silk stockings, frankly rejoicing in her superiority.

She would address them familiarly, as Spaniards address their servants.

"My man with whom I live is above all thy husbands in authority," she would say to them. "So am I above thee, for I am the woman of a white man!"

McPherson's weather-beaten old housekeeper on one occasion took exception to this.

"To-day art thou the woman of a white man," she told Lolita; "but to-morrow thou wilt be less than a widow, for the white man will leave thee, as my own white man will some day leave me, to return to his own people!"

Lolita turned upon her with flashing eyes.

"Say such an untruth again, and—"

Her Spanish-Indian temper escaped control. Reaching down to her garter, she drew a small, wicked-looking knife.

"It is the truth!" repeated McPherson's squaw stolidly.

Lolita advanced upon her, and the older woman seized a rock and hurled it. The other squaws scattered from their path. McPherson himself, coming down the trail at an opportune moment, intervened.

"Hell fire!" he roared, pushing his way through the crowd of native women, and seizing Lolita by the neck. "Drop that knife, or I'll smash your little jaw!" Then to his own woman he growled: "You go home! I'll attend to you later!"

Hamilton scolded Lolita that evening in his cabin.

"Why are you so sure that I shall never leave you?" he demanded.

She smiled a confident, mischievous smile, which made scolding difficult.

"So the dream told me. I have always known it, that you would come and take me, and would keep me as the white man weds—with one woman, forever and ever!"

"But why are you so sure that your dream will prove true?"

Her innocent confidence was still as strong as on their first evening together.

"Has not the first part of my dream proved true? Did not my master come, and did he not make me his woman?"

She crept into his arms and caressed him, running her fingers through his hair, and nestling her soft cheek against his tanned face.

"But some day, Lolita, I must go back to New York."

She laughed delightedly.

"Then I shall go with thee. Has not my master told me that I am more beautiful than the women of the pictures? If I thought that he was unhappy with me, I should kill myself, as to-day I should have killed the truthless woman of McPherson!"

"I am happy with you," he said.

She kissed him.

"Then we shall live together forever and ever, as it was in the dream! Say it, my master, for I would hear the words from thine own lips!"

Hamilton wavered. She was very much in earnest. If he told her the truth, he had no doubt that she would carry out her threat. Once more he lied to her.

"Forever and ever," he said.

Outside in the night there suddenly arose loud cheering and shouts of "Viva!" There was much tramping of hoofs and clinking of cartridge belts, and Creighton burst into the cabin.

"First blood for the San Angel!" he

shouted. "Pack train just came in—had a run-in with Yaquis, and drove them off without losing a thing! Brought the mail and everything!" He handed Hamilton an envelope. "Thought it might be important. It's from the New York office."

Hamilton opened it. It was from the president of the corporation. By the flickering light of a candle, Hamilton read:

We have learned through the Hermosillo office of this company that the noticeable decrease in production at the San Angel mines is due to your rash defiance to the Yaqui Indians, and your resultant policy of keeping a part of your force under arms, instead of leaving them at their work. You are well aware that it is our desire to maintain the good will of the Yaquis, and your conduct is in direct disobedience to orders from this office. We have therefore decided to request your immediate resignation as manager of the San Angel mines, and further request that you will leave the property at once.

Lolita put her arms about Hamilton's neck.

"My man is unhappy," she said. "I do not wish him to be unhappy. I wish him always to be contented, forever and ever!"

Hamilton was not listening to her. He was staring absently at the flickering candle.

V

LATE into the night Hamilton conferred with Creighton, McPherson, and the other Americans. They came to his house to congratulate him on the victory of his pack train, and remained to commiserate him on his dismissal.

"Hell fire! They can't mean it!" said the old shift boss. "We'll all get out, and let their damned mine go to blazes!"

Hamilton shook his head.

"The work must go on. When one assumes a responsibility—"

He stopped. He was thinking of Lolita.

"Yes," said Creighton, "we'll go on. I don't think we'll see the Yaquis again. That's the injustice of it. You've tried new tactics and made good—and you get fired for it."

"I wouldn't mind going, except for Lolita. I'm afraid she'll kill herself."

The girl was present, still with her arms about Hamilton's neck, but the men were speaking English.

"You'll have to kid her along," decided Creighton. "Tell her you're coming back. Perhaps she'll learn to like somebody else, and forget."

When the men had gone, Hamilton broke the news to Lolita. He was going away for

six weeks. He would return for her. Even if he did not get back within six weeks, she must not harm herself. She must wait for him. She promised.

"You believe me?" he asked.

The tears formed in her eyes again, but she nodded, trying to smile.

"Have I not heard it from my master's lips?"

Her head upon his shoulder that night reproached him with its faith and trust. He mentally reviewed the whole affair, trying to down his conscience with argument. He had taken the girl to save her from marriage with a man she hated. He had lived with her, and had promised fidelity, only to prevent her from foolishly sacrificing her life. He was not required to ruin his own future by taking the half-breed with him to civilization. Thus he reasoned that he was blameless; yet he could not rid his mind of this feeling of guilt.

He left early in the morning. Now that he had decided to desert her, he wanted to go as quickly as possible.

When the other Mexican employees crowded around his horse, inquiring the reason for his departure, he was forced to give them the same explanation that he had given Lolita. He was going away for about six weeks, he told them. Only McPherson's squaw divined the truth.

"Did I not tell thee?" she cried exultantly to Lolita. "Thy man leaves thee!"

Again McPherson averted bloodshed.

"Shut up!" he roared, slapping his squaw. "Damn women, anyway!"

Lolita tried to smile bravely once more.

"The woman spake not the truth!" she repeated over and over for the benefit of the other Mexicans. "My man returns. So has he told me himself."

When Hamilton embraced her, she clung to him until he tore himself away.

"Take the north trail," cautioned Creighton. "The Yaquis will probably be somewhere along the main road. Felipe's pack train is coming that way, and the Indians will be watching for him—unless they've decided to quit."

Hamilton shook hands with the men, and swung into his saddle. He did not dare to look at Lolita again, but as he rode away toward the mountain gap that led to the great world beyond, he knew that her heart and soul were with him. Long after the other watchers had retired, he knew she would be standing there in the finery he

had bought her, shading her eyes and gazing after him.

VI

WHEN he reached the mountains, and passed from the girl's view, he felt relieved. Much as he regretted his act, he sensed the satisfaction that always comes with an escape from an embarrassing predicament.

He would never hear from Lolita again. He would try to imagine that with the passing of time she had forgotten him. Perhaps her love for him had been only the calf love of a child. Perhaps she had never really intended to harm herself.

The north trail, unused since the building of the main road, was strewn with rocks and overgrown with brushwood. Forcing his horse over the difficult path took his mind from Lolita. As he scanned the prickly forests of cactus and the towering crags of dull gray rock, he rejoiced that he was leaving the desert.

Evening found him at the top of the pass, high up among peaks that glowed red in the last rays of the setting sun. Below him, miles distant, he saw the Mochtezuma River meandering across the valley like a silver ribbon, and beside it he made out the dark adobe huts of Suaqui. It was the hour when the wilderness becomes beautiful, and, despite his strongest efforts, it carried his memory back to Lolita.

As he rode forward down the last of the sloping foothills to the valley, the colorful sunset gave place to pale white moonlight. His horse, scenting fresh water ahead, quickened its pace, and carried him at a gallop toward the river.

"Halt!"

Hamilton gripped the lines, pulling the animal back sharply upon its haunches, while his free hand whipped out a revolver.

"*Quién es?*"

It was a Mexican voice. Hamilton shouted his name. There followed a whispered consultation on the opposite bank, then an order to advance. He rode forward, and found a group of the young men of Suaqui, all of them armed.

"The *señor* did not come by the main road?" they asked.

"No. What has happened?"

"The *señor* owes many thanks to his patron saint!"

All talking excitedly, they told him the news. Felipe's pack train, on its way to the mines, had been ambushed by Yaquis.

The escort had been annihilated—all except Felipe, who had escaped with the story. He was at the inn, wounded.

Dazed with the horror of the catastrophe, Hamilton hurried past the villagers and rode toward the inn. Lolita's mother was in the doorway. He dismounted and pushed by her into the building. Inside he found Felipe reclining upon a cot.

The old Mexican was apparently delirious from his experience.

"Talmatcho!" he shrieked.

Hamilton knelt beside him.

"Listen, Felipe—I'm not Talmatcho. I'm your friend. I'm Hamilton. Don't you know me, Felipe?"

A faint light of recognition came to Felipe's eyes.

"Yes, *señor*," he said weakly. "Go away, *señor*—Talmatcho look for you. One devil, Talmatcho! He hurt Felipe—stick him with sticks—he tell Felipe he do it because Felipe help Hamilton take the girl."

His voice became incoherent. When the words again became distinct, he said:

"I am Talmatcho. Now I go to the mine for keel everybody—everybody but the girl. I know where *Señor* Hamilton keep her—in one cabin in the yucca, yes. The girl I no keel. I keep the girl!"

He looked up at the American.

"Talmatcho tell me all that."

Hamilton drew back in dismay. The girl was alone in the hut on the edge of the settlement, and the Yaquis were now on their way toward it! And the miners, believing the Yaquis had been finally beaten, had relaxed their vigilance!

"My God!" he breathed.

"Too late now," Felipe continued. "Maybe Talmatcho, he have the girl. You get horse, *señor*, ride beeg distance."

Hamilton turned to Lolita's mother.

"Sell me a horse, a mule, anything that can travel. I've got a hard ride to make!"

The village priest, who stood at Felipe's bedside, laid a hand on Hamilton's arm.

"You are already tired, young man. Rest here to-night. It is a long journey to civilization."

Hamilton's jaw set hard.

"I'm not running away to civilization. I'm going back to the San Angel, to fight for my woman!"

VII

WITHOUT hesitation Hamilton took the main road. It was the very trail upon

which the massacre had occurred, and the route which the Yaquis were now traveling, but it was shorter than the north trail, over which he had come, and he must get to San Angel before the fighting was done.

There was no doubt in his mind now. His one thought was of the girl in the cabin among the yucca—his woman, his wife.

"Good God, give her back to me!" he breathed.

He had not prayed since the days of his childhood. In all the hell of Château-Thierry and Belleau Wood, he had not prayed; but he uttered a vow this night, and he meant it.

"Forever and ever!" he promised.

The weird moonlight that seeped down into the depths of the pass made strange figures of the cactus. Every clumsy stalk seemed to reach out a grotesque hand, as if to pluck Hamilton from his horse. Every stone took the form of a crouching Yaqui; but he rode recklessly, caring naught for the danger.

Passing between two huge walls of rock, he came suddenly upon the scene of the ambush. His horse snorted and shied from the distorted carcass of a fallen pack mule—snorted and reared, and plunged into the briars; but he beat it furiously, forcing it past the gruesome spectacle.

He rode on without pity for the beast. When it paused timidly at the top of a steep descent, he spurred its flanks. Once it stumbled, and they rolled over and over down a sandy embankment into the bushes below; but he recaptured the animal, and continued his wild ride.

Even before he emerged from the pass into the valley of the San Angel, he heard the crackle of rifles and bursts of fire from his machine guns. It meant that the miners were putting up a fight. They had not been taken by surprise. If only Lolita had reached the blockhouse!

As he came out into the open, he could see the battle plainly. Two miles before him the dry, thatched roofs of the cabins were ablaze, illuminating the whole valley with their red glow. Quickly he located his own house on the edge of town. It was still standing intact.

Leaping from his horse, he ran forward on foot, keeping as much as possible in the hollows. Suddenly, as he advanced, there sounded before him a series of explosions that shook the whole desert. Then the rifle fire died out.

Hamilton exclaimed aloud with joy. The hidden charges, set by his miners as a death trap for the Yaquis, had worked!

Discarding all caution, he climbed over the smoking craters, and ran through the deserted village toward the blockhouse, beneath a shower of sparks from the burning roofs. He screamed his own name loudly, lest the miners should mistake him for an enemy. The gate opened, and McPherson pulled him inside.

"We've beat 'em this time, boy!" he cried. "Your plans worked! Guess you'll continue to be boss around here now!"

Hamilton looked around quickly.

"Where's Lolita?" he panted.

McPherson shuddered.

"She didn't—"

Without waiting for him to finish, Hamilton turned, dashing out through the gate. McPherson tried to stop him.

"Come back here!" he shouted.

"Come on, Creighton!" Hamilton cried, paying no attention.

"I wouldn't go out there for a million dollars!" exclaimed Creighton.

After saying which, he immediately changed his mind, and joined McPherson in a dash after Hamilton.

There was no further need of caution. The Yaquis were gone, never to return. Hamilton plunged through the yucca and reached his cabin.

"Lolita!" he called loudly.

In the doorway he tripped over a prostrate body. He turned it over, and lighted a match. It was Talmatcho. He had been slain by Lolita's knife.

"Lolita!" Hamilton cried again.

A weak little voice guided Hamilton into the cabin. He lifted the girl from the floor, and set her gently upon the couch.

"You're hurt!" he gasped.

"Yes."

Quickly he made her comfortable with pillows, and lighted the lamp. There was a bullet wound just over her heart, but she smiled bravely at him.

"I knew my master would return!" she whispered, as he placed an arm about her shoulders. "All day the other women have been saying thou hadst deserted me, yet did I know they spake not the truth!"

He saw that she was again wearing the cotton dress that she had worn when first he took her from Suaqui.

"My other garments have I laid aside, to keep them for the day when thou shalt

take me to meet thine own people," she explained.

Her voice was growing weaker. She held out her hand to McPherson.

"Good-by, Señor Mac. I am going away now. I am going away with my man to his own city of New York, a city much larger than Suaqui, to become a lady like the ladies of the pictures!"

McPherson knelt and touched the hand to his grizzly beard. Then he climbed to his feet self-consciously.

"My Lord!" said Creighton. "Mac's crying!"

"I ain't, either. Hell fire!" protested the shift boss indignantly.

Then he turned away hurriedly, that they might not see his face.

"Damn it!" growled Creighton. "You've got me doing it!"

The girl still tried to whisper something—something about a dream that was to last forever and ever.

When Hamilton rose, the breaking day was just beginning to reveal the wilderness outside in all its repulsive hideousness.

"Better stick around," said Creighton. "You'll surely be reinstated as manager."

But Hamilton remained only until he had erected a wooden cross above a little mound in the yucca. Upon the cross he inscribed the name—"Mrs. John Hamilton."

Zoe and the Swami

THE STORY OF A STRANGE EXPERIMENT IN SNAKE CHARMING

By Margaret Busbee Shipp

MRS. WARD recalled the many occasions which she had dignified as turning points in her son's life—her decision to remain in New York after her husband's death; the choice of Garren's prep school, of his university, of his profession; war and its reaction—these things and many more. Why, in her absorbed young motherhood she had felt that the worst was over when he outgrew his infant tendency to croup!

Everything which she had exaggerated as being important took its true place as trivial, insignificant, now that she was confronted with the actual crisis; for Garren had just told her of his engagement to Zoe, the dancer whose American debut had been one of the sensations of the year. He had brought his happiness to his mother, as sunnily sure of her sharing it with him as he had been of her sympathy when he cut his thumb in his childhood, or of her rejoicing when he was elected captain of his football team.

Garren had been a year-old baby at the time of his father's death, and Mrs. Ward had poured all her hopes, her prayers, her

aspirations, into the single channel of his happiness and well-being. Now she was suddenly confronted with the stark fact that if youth chooses to ruin its life, there is nothing that maturity can do but hold its painful peace.

With her habit of trying to see her son's point of view as clearly as her own, she realized how compelling the force of attraction which drew him to Zoe must be, to make him fall in love with a girl absolutely outside of his own class. What seemed to her the most astounding tangent was to him the straight road to happiness. He was triumphant over his success in winning Zoe—heartbreakingly triumphant, it seemed to his mother, as she recalled the one occasion on which she had seen Zoe.

Garren had taken a box one evening, and his party arrived not long before Zoe's entrance. Her appearance was the signal for tumultuous applause.

"Did you ever see anything more deliberately indifferent than her manner?" exclaimed Freddy Wright. "She manages to convey the idea that she is hardly conscious of that noise—neither annoyed nor

gratified by it, merely waiting for it to be over. New York is so familiar with the glad-I-please-you type that it rather likes her cool insolence."

There was an amazing vivacity in the dance which followed—an intense aliveness, as if every pulse in her body was magnificently *aware*. It was no wonder that jaded critics gave her a grudging word of praise, and that novices could not find enough bizarre adjectives to describe her grace, her charm, her alien beauty. Bare to her slender thighs, she wore a short tunic in an Oriental texture of yellowish brown, and a strikingly audacious headdress.

"I'm bitterly disappointed in her clothes," remarked Dr. Hall. "I had understood that Zoe dressed merely in a handkerchief, and waved that most of the time!"

Garren had frowned slightly. Mrs. Ward had thought it was because her son was afraid that Hall might make some dubious remark before Betty Erskine. Afterward she remembered that his eyes were riveted on the enchanting movements of that slender and lovely body.

He had managed to meet Zoe the next day, he now confided to his mother, and he had seen her every day since, though she had been tremendously discreet about appearing in public with him. Her manager—a fat, froglike fellow, even to the warts—was mad about her, and as he had signed a liberal contract with her for the following year, Zoe was unwilling to antagonize him; so she had decided that their engagement must be kept secret until the end of the season. It wasn't very long to wait, and then he would insist upon their marriage. It was the most incredible thing in the world that a beauty and a genius like Zoe could content herself with an ordinary man like himself!

"*Ordinary!*" his mother gasped, and was silent.

His clean good looks, his dear smile, his assured income and excellent prospects, his long inheritance from honorable New England and Virginia forbears—these were "ordinary" gifts to place at the feet of a dancing girl, with a fat frog for one's possible rival!

Garren laughed and kissed her.

"Dear little mother! It's a blessed arrangement that a man has one person in all the world who sees him in heroic stature, and never in actual life size. I want you to call on her, dear. Her apartment will

show you the sort of girl she really is. There's nothing tawdry or garish about it—it's like a bit of the woods in the heart of New York."

II

MRS. WARD thought the place was rather like a jungle, when she was ushered into the living room of Zoe's apartment; but it was undeniably charming. The wall was hidden under leaf-green hangings. There was a dull, earth-brown rug on the floor, as soft as dead leaves in a forest. In the deeply recessed windows were ferns and magnificent palms. Mrs. Ward was peculiarly sensitive to odors, and she enjoyed the mingled scents of the ferns, the moist earth, and a heavily perfumed tropical flower which was unfamiliar to her.

Suddenly she was startled, and turned apprehensively to find that the girl had entered the room. So noiseless was her footfall—the light step of the dancer—that the visitor had not heard her come in.

Then all impressions were submerged in the sense of Zoe's arresting beauty. Her eyes, like clear jewels, met Mrs. Ward's with their direct, impelling gaze. Her lips, beautifully curved and thinly cut, were deep crimson; her skin was satin soft in texture. She wore a street frock of her favorite brown and a hat that brought out all the tawny brown tints of her hair. She had been on the point of going out shopping, she explained, but of course she was glad to see Mrs. Ward.

It was plain after that one long, deliberate scrutiny that she classified her visitor as a person of negligible importance, though to be dealt with politely as Garren's mother. In fact, many of Garren's friends had the same impression about Mrs. Ward, as a dear little neutral-tinted mother who never nagged, and who assumed small authority.

Mrs. Ward had dressed with studied care for that interview. She wore a tweed suit which had done good service. She had hunted up a hat of the season before, and had even removed its redeeming aigrette. She did not look as she usually did—a pleasing, mature gentlewoman, well dressed, but not conspicuously modish. In fact, when she confronted herself in the glass, she thought with complete satisfaction:

"I look just about as important as a small speckled hen!"

She knew that the more inoffensive and dull she appeared, the less on guard with

her Zoe would be; and this was her only chance to find out something for herself about the girl who was to be her son's wife.

She began to prattle to Zoe of her boy, his tastes, his habits, his teething idiosyncrasies, his succession of dogs. The dancer was bored—politely, at first, and then frankly—by the artless mother prattle. Dull as she was deliberately endeavoring to be, Mrs. Ward thought with a pang how sweet Betty Erskine's eyes were as she listened to some trifling incident of Garren's boyhood.

At last Mrs. Ward was on her feet, making her adieus. When she reached the street, her face was pale and drawn, as if she had been breathing bad air.

III

GARREN did not especially care about the dinner which his mother insisted upon having soon afterward, but he consented when he saw that her heart was set upon it. He might as well introduce his fiancée to "the bunch" at one time as another. To himself he said "the bunch," but in the unspoken depth of his heart he stifled a pang that Betty Erskine and Zoe were such different types that they would never prove congenial—and Betty and he had been such wonderful pals always!

Mrs. Ward lived in the comfortable home that she had occupied ever since her marriage, though shops were beginning to encroach upon the neighborhood. The interior was unusually charming, with the mahogany and the portraits that she had brought years before from her Virginia home. She had transformed the whole third story into a ballroom, and many and merry were the parties held there.

The evening of the dinner did not begin auspiciously for Garren, because not until they were in his car, on the way to the dinner, did Zoe realize that it was to be in his home, instead of a restaurant. To Zoe, at her ease in any restaurant from Tokyo to Paris, a perfectly appointed dinner in a private home had the annoyance of the unfamiliar.

"The bunch" surrounded her, however, and made much of her. They praised her dancing, and begged that she would be generous to them later, until Garren felt boyishly elated over the tact and good fellowship of "the jolliest crowd on earth."

It was annoying that the one false note should come from his gentle, self-effacing

mother, who had elected to invite a guest of her own to this intimate circle. She explained him, with deference, as "the swami."

"Of course a Hindu cannot eat our fare, so he will be served alone in the breakfast room, as is his preference; but you shall meet him afterward."

It was unusual in that set to have professional entertainers, as they were abundantly able to entertain themselves, so the presence of the swami was a matter of some speculation.

"Will he make a tree grow from a bean, and climb to the top of it?" asked one of the girls. "I've always longed to see that done!"

"Just so it's a stunt and not a poem," said Freddy Wright; "but I know Mrs. Ward wouldn't let us in for that." He turned to Betty Erskine, who sat on the other side of him. "The big trick in Hindu poetry seems to be that it makes about as much sense to read the words backward, forward, or alternately. Gee whiz-z-z, how she daz-z-z-zles me!"

The elongated z's were an unwilling tribute to the girl at Garren's right. She was clad—perhaps that is not the exact word, where so much of the lovely body was bare—in a gown of amber tulle, embroidered in metallic threads, with a train of brown velvet. A turban of dull gold sequins with creamy yellow paradise plumes brought out all the beauty of her clear eyes, like pale-colored jewels. Her beauty had such a vivacious quality that the other women at the table seemed devitalized in comparison.

"If she had half as much on her body as she has trailing on the floor, she'd be completely covered," thought Freddy, but he did not say it aloud.

He caught the puzzled questioning in Betty's voice as she lowered it to ask:

"Is that wonderful creature going to dance for us, actually?"

He let her have it straight, his heart aching for what he saw—what surely she must guess from Garren's look of infatuation.

"It's rather more than that, I think. Garry's not been playing around with us much this last month, Betty. Zoe seems to have fascinated him—er—temporarily."

Betty did not reply.

"Good girl!" Freddy silently approved. "Took the blow in the face, and didn't bat an eyelid. She's a true little sport!"

But beneath the table Betty's slender

hands were locked in her lap, twisting together until she felt the pain.

IV

THE dinner passed off gayly. Secure of herself, of her power, Zoe dominated it all as easily as she held her audiences.

Mrs. Ward began to have a sick fear that she had made a mistake. She had everything at stake—her son's love for her, his faith in her. She tried to take her usual gentle part in the gay chatter, but she could not follow what was being said. She no longer saw Garry as he was, clean-cut, long-limbed, straightforward, a son to rejoice the heart. He was the laughing baby whose young father lay dead in the adjoining room—the baby to whose protection she had dedicated her life.

Vaguely she seemed to hear the butler's discreet cough. She came back to her surroundings and rose a little unsteadily to her feet.

Coffee and liqueurs were served in an adjoining room, where the swami joined them. In his white Indian garments, his head turbaned in white, he made an impressive figure, so unusual in those surroundings that his appearance must have upset the equilibrium of the well trained butler. The swami had seated himself next to Zoe. As Dennis attempted to light a cigarette for him, there was somehow a flash of fire. Zoe's sweeping paradise plumes had caught fire, but were instantly extinguished, as the swami, with great presence of mind, quickly slapped out the tiny flames.

A furious exclamation sprang from Zoe's lips. Dennis, mumbling incoherent apologies, vanished from the room, to explain dazedly to sympathetic hearers below stairs that it was not his fault, anyhow.

The Hindu, looking straight into Zoe's eyes, narrowed and bright with anger, spoke to her soothingly in a strange tongue, which the other guests assumed to be his own. Then he gently removed the ruined head-dress with its scorched plumes. She moved her head uneasily, but did not take her eyes from his face.

"She will dance for you now," he said to the others in his slow, precise English.

"It's too soon after dinner, isn't it, Zoe?" Garren asked solicitously. "Though you didn't eat as much as a humming bird, for that matter!"

She shook her head impatiently at him, her eyes still fixed on the swami.

The swami took a flutelike instrument from the folds of his robe, and played a strangely poignant prelude. It slipped into a curious, half barbaric strain, monotonous, yet with a note of command. The girl rose, her body swaying rhythmically. Then that small group of onlookers saw a dance which they could never forget until memory itself was forgotten.

Zoe caught her train and twisted its soft brown folds around one arm, but it was not more pliant than the movements of her sinuous, exquisite body, with a grace that seemed more than mortal.

It was as if they entered with her into the kingdom of the dance—an empire older than the oldest throne, a dynasty stretching beyond human knowledge, gathering its myrmidons from the four corners of the earth, as glad as youth, as resistless as the tide, as capricious as the wind, as enduring as time.

She seemed to pass still farther back—before recorded time. Was she portraying a dance unknown to mankind by name or chronicle, far older than the secret dances of the hill tribes of Hindustan, or the imitative dances of a primitive civilization, picturing the chase or the battle or the victory—older than the devil dances of the Veddahs? It was as if she glimpsed a prehistoric earth before the beasts and the creeping things knew the dominion of man.

Mrs. Ward stole a glance at her son. He seemed less aware than the others of the magic of the dance, for his eyes were on Zoe's face, studying the subtle change which had come over it.

He had never before seen the girl without one of the elaborate coiffures she affected. Now for the first time he saw her head absolutely bare. How strangely it was shaped—flattened slightly, the forehead low and sloped back! How unblinking the eyes were, with their jewel-like clearness! How evil the thin lips and the restless, darting tongue!

He shook his mind free from the hideous likeness which occurred to him. Did his friends think they saw—what he denied to himself that he saw? He glanced furtively at their faces, but they were rapt, as if under the spell of a common fascination.

What was this thing that Zoe was dancing now? What hot, revolting secret of the jungle was the swami bringing to view? The dancing grew swifter and fiercer. The music had a dull, reiterated note, like the

beating of summer rains steaming against the heated earth. There was the thrill of lush growth, of mating.

It became unendurable, intolerable, to the man who watched. He crossed in a stride to the swami, put a hand roughly on his shoulder, and spoke in a voice of harsh authority:

"Enough of this! You are tiring her. Can't you see she is—"

The sentence was never finished. As Garren put that angry hand on the Hindu's shoulder, Zoe darted swiftly at him. There was a girl's scream, and then a man's anguished cry:

"Mother! Mother darling, are you hurt?"

It had happened with incredible swiftness. There were those present who swore that when Zoe darted forward, her neck dilated broadly as she struck at Garren.

But love was swifter still, for Mrs. Ward's arm came in between, and her wrist bore the marks of Zoe's teeth.

Zoe stood vibrantly still, like one awakened but dazed, with her unblinking eyes fixed on the swami. It was as if they two were alone in an alien world.

He spoke to her soothingly, in the same strange tongue. Then he turned to Hall, who was examining Mrs. Ward's arm.

"You are doctor? Yes? There is no big danger, though the cauterize may be wiser. I grieve much, *mem-sahib*, that you are hurt. Zoe very tired from much dance. Shall I take her home?"

There was a furious buzz of protest, silenced by Mrs. Ward's imperative—

"Let them go at once, please!"

V

It was after the last reluctant guest had gone, and the doctor had cauterized the wound, that mother and son were alone together again.

Garren, pale as death, and shaken to the depths of his soul, laid his head against his mother's on her pillow, as he had done hundreds of times as a penitent small boy.

"My precious, bravest little mother!" he began stumbly. "When I watched that dance, different from anything I had ever seen her dance before, and when I saw her horrible flat head"—he shuddered violently—"some unaccountable repulsion awoke in me, but I thought it too late to break off in honor. Then, when she struck you—you! I've been such a headlong sort of a

damned fool, I don't deserve such a mother as you, or such—a friend as Betty. Did you see, mother, that she jumped forward too? She was willing to risk herself to save me from that—that— Little brave Betty! I seemed to realize in a flash that I should have queered my life forever if she was out of it. It's you who saved us all, darling! How did you guess—what I cannot yet make up my mind to believe?"

She laid a tender hand on his bent head. He apprehended that there were depths in his mother—as perhaps in all instinctive, protective motherhood—which he had never sounded.

"When I went to see her, Garry, I was wondering why she had created that jungle to live in. Suddenly there was something—I can hardly call it an odor—it was more an emanation, but distinct to my sensitiveness in that regard. I turned in fright, to find that Zoe had entered the room. I thought I must be mistaken, though I had never before been mistaken in the proximity of any of *them*. Haven't you heard your uncle tell of the time we were camping in the Blue Ridge, when I was a small child, and I came whimpering to him, vainly trying to describe a sensation I had no words for, and he found a rattlesnake in a clump of blackberries? I can't define it even now, but it sickens me like bad air. I stayed talking to her for a long time, watching the pose of her body as she relaxed, and always it was as if something inherent in me was on guard. When I left her, I went to church. I wanted to think quietly, not to be unjust or hysterical. A missionary was making a talk about different forms of pagan worship, and when he spoke of the ancient 'serpent well' he explained the name 'Zohemoth' as a Hebrew word for 'serpent.' *Zohemoth, the serpent*—I couldn't hear another word! The next day I sought out the swami."

"Who in Sam Hill is he, dear, and where did you find him?"

"Of course he isn't a swami, but he is a Hindu. I paid him a thousand dollars, and left everything to him. It was his suggestion that he must get Zoe's head bare. He was advertised as the most expert snake charmer ever brought from Asia, and I went to the circus and watched him with his trained"—she hesitated, and brought out the word with a shudder—"cobras."

Her son's arms closed hard around her, his lips against the bandaged wrist.

Borrowed Fire

HOW A KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN FEUD CAME TO NEW ENGLAND

By Charles Neville Buck

Author of "The Roof Tree," "The Mountain Woman," etc.

XXIX

WATCHING there in the sick room swept by the scouring freshness of the ocean air and dimmed by drawn blinds, Phyllis was keeping yet another bitter secret of her own.

The life which she had insisted, even to the point of a broken love, must be as open as that breeze, had become compact with lies and secrecies. In most of them she had herself been a participant. She had lied to save Dick at the critical instant, and had failed because she had not carried her pretense to its full period. She was sheltered just now by the lie he had told the law's representative, in order to shield her. He had not been actuated by love for her, but by some primitive upflaring in himself of the feud spirit which he had always denied—the spirit of private reprisal for private wrongs, and of the jealous guarding of an injured honor from outside interference.

But this secret which gnawed at her heart with a corrosive and unrelenting ache was different.

"I sometimes think," she had falteringly suggested to Dr. Merton, "that my presence in the room sends his temperature up, and excites him. I want to stay, I want to watch over him, and yet I wonder if I ought!"

Merton smiled. He knew nothing of the anathema fire, the blaze of execration, that lighted his patient's eyes like madness when those eyes rested on Phyllis unobserved. Miss Barrow, the competent nurse, who kept her chart and followed her efficiency rules so conscientiously, knew nothing of it, either. With a guileful care that actuated all his conscious moments, the sick man showed to them only the expected spirit

of affection—the same spirit that had manifested itself when he had taken his wife's hand in his own as he talked to the deputy sheriff. When he raved in delirium, they attached no significance to what he said. So the secret remained secure; the secret that stood between these two like a specter of hate forged and welded out of transmuted love.

"I've watched Miss Barrow's chart," went on Phyllis. "I've seen the temperature go up, up, like a flood tide nearing the point where it breaks the dike. Almost always, when I've been with him, and he's been conscious enough to know it, the curve has been upward. Ought I to—to wait outside, doctor, and only slip in when he doesn't know?"

Merton shook his head.

"I told you I needed you as an ally. I told you that we were depending more on love here than medicine; and to him you stand as the incarnation of love."

He paused, and she, stifling the impulse to cry out, waited and listened.

"Look at him there, Mrs. Carson. I told you what we must expect. The pierced lung is congested with blood. The other is trying to do double work, against the handicaps of fever and weakness. The heart is struggling, too. You see how shallow and painful his breathing is. He has to fight for breath."

"Yes, yes!" she exclaimed tensely. "Good God, don't I know it? Don't I dream of it? Don't I find myself trying to breathe for him as I sit watching him?"

"I know. His body is a battleground just now. We doctors know that while we may administer material remedies, a more powerful factor is the spirit that fights inside the man himself—the will to live. We

Copyright, 1922, by Charles Neville Buck—This story began in the September (1922) number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

can only bring up the ammunition, as it were. It's the will to live that must supply the morale. He needs you here."

She opened her lips to speak, but he had not quite finished.

"At first," he said, "I wondered if you could stand it. I wondered whether any woman could come through such a shock without collapse; but I've measured your courage, Mrs. Carson, and now I'm counting on your help."

Leaning on her! If she did not break into bitterly hysterical laughter at his words, it was only because she strangled the sudden impulse by physical coercion. Merton was telling her that a doctor could supply only the materials of combat, and that in the will to live, born of Dick's love for her, the patient had his one chance to conquer. If that were true, the defense had no morale and no sure hope. If that were true, the doctor was depending on the false support of a love which bitter disillusionment had fused into a white-hot lava of suspicion and solidified into the black slag of hate.

To one's doctor, one's lawyer, or one's priest, one should be impeccably honest. Life and death struggles admit of no evasion. Concealment of vital fact must rank as treason. Phyllis clenched her hands and closed her eyes in preparation for what she must do. The only honest course was to go into the confessional with Merton and tell him the truth. Then, at least, though she gave Dick the lie, his doctor might fight for him forearmed with understanding.

But while she braced herself, she heard Merton's voice again, and again she waited. While he talked, the need of confession left her, and she knew that her secret must, after all, remain her own.

"In a case like this," he was telling her, "an indomitable spirit wins and a flawed or weak spirit goes under. Strength of motive is needed—such strength of motive as can be inspired by only two things in life, love and hate."

"Hate?" she echoed wonderingly, yet grasping at the word.

Merton smiled as he nodded his head.

"It's not the character of the will so much as its intensity," he asserted. "A strong enough hate, though it's a bitter medicine, can put iron into a man's soul as effectively as love. Here that's an academic question, of course, but psychologically it's interesting."

"Yes," she echoed faintly. "It's interesting. Love or hate—either one!"

"In these days," he laughed, "we don't often find the sincere haters that old times and conditions produced. Still, we have records of men so dedicated to vengeance that they've refused to die when by every physical law they should have found it impossible to live."

So she need not confess, after all! She could sit there seeming to be holding Dick to life by the contact of her love, when in her own heart she knew that she was roweling him to victory by the tortures of hate!

Yes, Dr. Merton said that it was bitter medicine—more bitter for her than for Dick, she thought; yet if it was all that would save him, he must have it. She knew now, after all her wandering along paths of doubt and caprice, that love was the remedy she wished him to take from her; but if he repudiated that, and if the other would serve, so be it. She must go on sitting there, in order that when his eyes opened he could whet his unappeased wrath on the sight of her.

That was the secret she was keeping now, when, for him, the first stage of exhaustion, with its benison of sleep, had passed, and he had gone down into the seven hells of fever; when his breast heaved and fluttered to the pain of his shallow breathing; when the heart had to be constantly watched, like a balky engine which, once stopped, would not go on again.

Phyllis sat as if her chair had been a whipping post and her emotions a strait-jacket, while delirium spoke from lips that had enough to do to keep breathing.

Once he sat up abruptly.

"Circe couldn't do it," he declared in a weak frenzy, "if she weren't beautiful—and lovely—"

He fell back. While Miss Barrow was gently composing and covering him, his voice came half smothered from the pillow:

"It's because men trust her. She couldn't have—turned us into swine—if we hadn't trusted her. Judas woman!"

Phyllis writhed and held to her chair. But perhaps it was even harder when, in his wandering thought, he went back and acted over scenes of their love-making, always clouded and troubled by some sense of tragic loss.

"Green days in the mountains and blue days by the sea," the wounded man murmured almost inaudibly.

She remembered how that line had been a favorite with them in their days of courtship, how it had been one of those trivial things that had taken on meaning and sweetness by dear associations.

"Green days in the mountains and blue days by the sea," he repeated. "Together, dearest! That will be our life—together!"

Then he groaned and tried to rise again.

"You *are* there, aren't you?" he demanded in an anguished whisper. "I see you there—and yet I know it's a dream. Come, let me touch you, dearest! Let me be sure!" He broke off, panting, and then added in despair: "No, don't come! If I touch you—you'll melt—and vanish. You always vanish!"

She sat with her hands resting, palms upward, in her lap, and her fingers as unstirring as wax. With eyes of memory she was seeing the picture of that last day on the beach, before their marriage, when he had smilingly forecast "green days in the mountains and blue days by the sea."

She felt again the thrill of almost prayerful love that had gone through her and electrified her as his arms closed about her. It was a gracious and chivalrous lover whom she remembered from that day—a lover to whom she had proudly meant to give herself till death.

As she lived over again those well remembered hours, the fever fires faded out of the drawn face on the pillow, leaving it colder and more lucid of expression. Again Dick recognized her, not through mazes of delirium, but in actual fact, as he construed fact, and again his eyes kindled balefully into embers. On her afresh they rained blistering imprecation, and once more his lips shaped the soundless words:

"Judas woman!"

To all these harrowing incursions of death across the field of his life, science could fix cold and technical terms. It could index and catalogue his sufferings into stages, and call them by such names as "congestion" and "consolidation." It could designate the tortures of progressive periods as "red hepatitis" and "gray hepatitis"; but Phyllis knew that it was all merely a question whether his hate for her was stronger or weaker than death.

Cullom Bowes had received the telegram which Phyllis had sent him after her interview with Lawrence Speed. "Come—I need you," it had said, and he was coming.

He did not know that she had reached a point where her heart would burst unless she could unbosom herself, and that she had thought of him as the one human being whom she could wholly trust. He knew only that he had told her that he was ready to serve her "up to and including murder," and that he had been sent for.

He had no mountain range, infested with enemies, to cross—only an open road in a fast car; but it is doubtful whether even Joe Carson, with his later start and his longer journey, went with a more anxious mind. It would scarcely be fair to inquire into his thoughts when the shocking news of his old friend's injury had first come to his ears. He and Dick Carson had been friends of such long standing and such stern testing that love for the man now hanging on the verge of death had struck its roots deep into Cullom's heart. Whether such a strong affection between two men can weigh preponderantly against the love which a man gives to a woman may well be a problem for debate.

Dick Carson had been the successful rival of Cullom Bowes, as well as his friend in youth and manhood. Now Dick was hurt, perhaps mortally—and his wife might soon be free.

When Bowes had seen her last, there had been trouble in her eyes. He may have thought of that, and a hope which had been condemned and chained may have leaped like fire in his heart; but if self-interest momentarily intruded itself, as in human nature it may have done, the man promptly thrust it back into its locked compartment, at least until a more seasonable time.

All that he could think of now was the grief of the woman smitten with such cruel suddenness. He had dismissed the possibility that the misery he had seen in her face came from any failure of love. What he would see to-day would no doubt disprove any such idea, and Bowes, whose sympathy with Phyllis was as strong as his love, could not for that very reason draw as close to her as he wished. As strongly now as on the day when he had officiated at the wedding, there lay upon him the obligation of remembering that he was an outsider; but he had been sent for, and he was responding.

In deference to his wounded friend's need of quiet, Bowes left his car standing at a distance from the house. When he approached its door on foot, he felt afresh

that commotion of excited pulses which came to him with the thought of seeing Phyllis.

There on the threshold she stood at the moment of his arrival, and silently she came out to meet him. Her loveliness was shrined, for Cullom, in a love-born magic which made him see her always through an aura of worship. His throat worked spasmodically as he sought to speak, and tumult possessed him, for her beauty showed through a pallor of suffering that gave her an exquisite pathos and brought an ache to his heart.

"How is Dick?" he asked.

She took his arm and began leading him away toward the pine woods, where the sun fell in golden flecks and shafts, filtered through shadowy greenness.

"He's holding death back by sheer force of will," she answered soberly. "I'm going to tell you all about it, Cullom. I sent for you because I had to talk to some one—because, unless I do talk to some one, the things in my heart will burst it!"

He went along at her side, troubled by the tremor of spirit which he recognized under the outward steadiness of her forced calm, and somewhat baffled, too, by her next words.

"I want to take you over there in the woods, where we can be alone, because"—she paused, and a haunted note stole into her voice—"because here I feel surrounded by spies."

He forbore to question her as to that strange statement, and remained sympathetically silent. Her heart was heavily burdened, and needed to pour out its distress after its own methods and through its self-selected channels. His present affair was to listen.

When she halted, though they had not come far, Bowes realized that she had brought him to a spot which might have been in the heart of a deep forest. About them were white pines, Scotch firs, and plume-tall poplars, where red squirrels chattered and birds chirped busily. She halted by a pulpitlike bowlder, which, in its sheltered place, had been cushioned by the pine needles of season after season, now lying inches deep. It was a place tranquil enough, and seemingly remote enough, for confessional or for confidence.

The man's pulses were still leaping to the stimulus of her nearness. His brain was busy with its self-admonition:

"Hold steady! Remember, she's not yours!"

Phyllis herself stood for a moment gazing past him with eyes that were enigmatic and rapt with the absorption of a crystal gazer. Then, suddenly, she broke out.

"You must let me talk in my own way, Cullom," she said. "Perhaps, it won't be a good way, but unless I say these things as they come to me I shall go mad!"

"I'm here to listen," he assured her; "and if I can do it in any way, I'm here to help."

"Dick wasn't accidentally hurt," she declared abruptly. "He was shot down by a man who thought he was serving me."

The start with which Bowes received that assertion could hardly have been more violent had it been himself whom some enemy had attempted to shoot down. His lips moved and closed again. Over him broke the terrifying conviction that this woman, whom he loved, had suffered too much, and had become unbalanced.

"You think the shock has driven me crazy," she went on, shaking her head as she read his thoughts. "It hasn't. I'm sane enough. Listen!"

So he listened, while the color in his tanned and ruddy cheeks ebbed out, and while she stood before him, slender but rigid, her words coming not in tumult, but in the even tone of utter despair. He felt that he was standing by helpless while she underwent a torture which he could hardly endure to see, but which he was powerless to mitigate.

She had gone back in her narrative to its beginning, with the clash between Joe Carson and herself over the old portrait in the billiard room. She sketched the quarrel with Dick as they had driven from the wedding to their own home, reviewing her accusation that he had killed her love by the weakness and treachery of his cowardly evasion. She told fully of the armed truce that had stood between them in lieu of any honeymoon.

Cullom, listening with staggered amazement, knew that all this was only preparatory to something still more disastrous. Through it he could feel the gathering spirit of portent and the onward march of doom. Through it he could even envision something of the incredible thing that lay back of it all as motive and incitement—the spirit of the feud itself, with its unquenchable fire.

At last she paused.

"That day down by the cove," said Bowes, in a shaken voice, "I read unhappiness in your eyes. I couldn't understand it, but I saw it. I wondered then whether you could have found that you had made a mistake; but I told myself it was just my own heart hunger reading things into the situation that weren't there."

"I have made many mistakes," she told him.

"Phyllis," he declared brokenly, "I'm not here as a self-seeking lover now. God knows that I want to serve you, and the only way I can serve you is as a friend; but while I live I shall love you. For me the world is empty, except for you. Call on me, dear, in any way, at any time, to any extent. To serve you means my only happiness."

She smiled wanly.

"I know, Cullom dear," she said. "Just now I want to unbosom myself to you. I want to put into the relief of words things that have been shut in my heart, gnawing at it like cancers."

"I'm here to listen," he made steady response.

The grateful balm of his sympathy seemed to infold her, and to thaw the ice that had frozen her grief and sealed the fount of her tears. She dropped to the ground and covered her face. Like rain after a devastating drought came a flood of passionate weeping. The man, pale and wretched, could only look on, letting a hand rest for a moment on her shoulder, while his heart burned to press her to his breast, where she might sob out her grief like a hurt child.

XXX

"You see," Phyllis went on, when the storm of tears had spent itself and left her more composed, "the issue between us loomed deadly real to me. I had set Dick up on a pedestal of strength, and he seemed fallen to pitiful weakness. I compared him subconsciously with his brother—to his detriment."

"His brother," echoed Bowes wrathfully, "seems to be a damned mischief-making brute who came to your wedding to destroy your happiness!"

"A brute, perhaps, but a strong brute," she answered. "It suddenly seemed, in the light of that contrast, that Dick was only a sort of beautifully engraved ceremonial

sword in a handsome scabbard, after all, and not a blade forged and sharpened for combat."

"And so you two stood apart in a sort of armed truce when we thought you were in a paradise of happiness?"

"Yes, and while we stood apart the belief grew on me that my love had been a delusion. Could any worth-while love have proved so brittle a thing as that? Could any mischief-making brother have shaken us to doubt or quarrel if our love had been genuine? I kept asking myself those questions, and all the answers were negative. My hero had collapsed overnight."

"And yet," Bowes forced himself to make loyal declaration, "I've seen Dick tried in many ways. He's a true-tempered blade, for all your doubting."

"Let me finish," she begged, "because there is much to be said. I meant to abide by the mistake, if I had made one. I didn't mean to repudiate my bargain. I only meant to hold him off till the truce ended. Then that horrible night came, and I lied to save him. I played out a love scene that I didn't feel, to stop an assassin whom I couldn't stop any other way."

"Yes?" he whispered, as she paused, wiping the nervous moisture from his temples. "Yes?"

"Then Dick took me in his arms, and I went wild," she declared tempestuously. "I thought the danger was over. I couldn't bear his victorious embraces. They scalded and humiliated me. I hated him, and I showed it—and the man in ambush shot him down!"

"Good God!" breathed Bowes.

"Shot him down," she repeated, with a voice that lifted to wildness, "because he thought I wanted him shot. The worst of it is that just then my own heart wasn't far from having murder in it!"

The man said nothing.

"And that is the awful horror of it!" Phyllis went on. "I had longed for his love in the old days. I had longed for his love in every form and aspect—gentleness, passion, everything. He did nothing, he said nothing that night which wouldn't have raised me to ecstasy before—and then the shot came!"

"And after that moment—"

"It wasn't a moment—it was an eternity. In it the world was destroyed and made over. The things that I had believed to be solid were all melted into lava and solidified

again in new shapes. I knew that all my doubts had only been caprice—crazy illusions. I knew that the one thing so granite-strong that nothing could ever change it again was my love for Dick Carson—and I had lost him!"

Cullom Bowes trembled, but he kept a hard grip on his self-command and nodded his head silently. The tempting voice of selfish hope within him had been rudely silenced now—silenced beyond even a feeble effort to make itself heard.

"That, at least, was no capricious change," she went desperately on; "even if it took place in what we call a few moments. They were moments lit up by lightning bolts of revelation. I saw Dick's soul stripped stark naked, and there wasn't any flaw of weakness in it. It was heroic—superb. He was trying to face the man who had attacked him. I had just been too weak to understand his strength and courage before."

She paused, and the fire went out of her tone. When she spoke again, it was with the hushed earnestness of one in the confessional. Her self-accusation was unsparing.

"I think, Cullom," she declared, "that I was one of those who weren't strong enough to go through the war unscathed. I was one of those who came back from overseas abnormally sensitive, morbidly quick of resentment. It seemed to me that out of a war like that there ought to have come victors touched with the consecration of a crusade. Instead, I saw a jazzing, reckless world of bloated profiteers, radicals gone mad, and reactionaries ossified; and I turned to Dick as the one fixed planet of my own little orbit."

She paused, but only for a moment.

"And Dick," she added, "understood me better than I understood myself. He saw that I was spiritually shell-shocked. He tried to shield me and win me gradually back to myself. I, in my criminal folly and capriciousness, thought he was less courageous and honest than I. He was vastly more so!"

"Dick," assented Bowes, "can see into character. He's almost clairvoyant that way."

"That night," she continued, "I stood face to face with the blazing essentials of life and death. So did Dick. We were in a white-hot furnace, and I'd lost him there. Its fire melted all his love for me, and remade it into a hate so powerful that I

couldn't understand it, except to recognize in it a gage of what his love had been."

"If his love is so strong," Bowes assured her, "it will survive even what it's been through."

"It's because his love was so strong that his hate is so strong now," she contradicted. "I shall never have his love again. It's dead—everlastingly dead. It wasn't until I had lost it that I knew how much I wanted it—how desperately I needed it!"

Once more her words stumbled to a halt. When she spoke again, it was in a low-pitched tone of despair.

"It's just his hatred of me that's keeping him alive now," she said. "They think it's love, but I know the truth, and it's killing me by inches!"

"And yet," Bowes reminded her, "you say it was Dick himself who shielded you with this perjury about an accident?"

"That was only because Dick, who had laughed at the survival of feudal tendencies in modern blood, turned feudist himself at the first crisis. He saved me because he means to punish me himself. He saved me because it was no part of his plan to let outsiders usurp his own right. He's planning something satisfying to his bitterness of spirit, and he's overcoming death to carry it out."

"But what punishment can he inflict on you?"

"I don't know," she said wearily; "but he knows. He's lying there in bed thinking about it, planning it. If he only knew it, he's torturing me now in a way that would make the electric chair seem like a place of mercy. Dear God, Cullom, if you could see his eyes!"

"Just the same, Phyllis," argued Bowes incredulously, "I think you're imagining part of all this horror. Dick isn't a feudist. He was always inclined to scoff at the fetishes of heredity."

"Yes, he scoffed, but at the first crisis he turned feudist himself," she insisted obdurately. "The very essence of the vendetta spirit is private reprisal. If Dick dies, he'll die with his lips locked to outsiders; but if he lives—"

"A few drops of blood in a man's veins don't overcome every law of civilized environment," Bowes contended.

Phyllis shook her head.

"I tell you Dick's a feudist," she made inflexible reiteration; "and so am I."

"You?"

"Yes, I. I love Dick now with all that's in me. To win back his respect would ease my soul out of its purgatory. It's all I ask now. I don't hope for his love back, and yet—"

"Yet what?"

"Yet that clan fire is so strong in me that I can't forget I'm a Powell. I can't throw over to the sharks the poor old man who did me this hideous injury in the name of loyalty. He thought he was freeing me from bondage, and he was willing to let his own life pay the forfeit. No human being could have so injured me, and yet he's my man to shield—my clansman."

"This clan idea is all beyond my ken," declared Bowes, bewildered. "It seems to me pretty much like trying to translate one's self back into the Middle Ages. It simply can't be done. All I know, Phyllis, is that I love you and am eager to serve you. I love Dick, too, but if I've got to choose between you, there isn't any doubt where I stand."

"Joe will come, of course," Phyllis said after a moment. "I was going to telegraph him, but I found that Kayami had already done it. When Joe comes, Dick won't keep his secret locked up in his heart any longer."

"Why won't he? What business is it of Joe's?"

"They are brothers," she answered simply. "I've had to tell you this whole wretched story because I couldn't any longer bear it in silence. Dick will have to tell some one, too. He'll talk to Joe. They're one blood. All the torture that has been scalding Dick's soul and holding the life in his body will come out then—to Joe. If Dick dies, Joe will act in his stead for the family honor and the family vengeance."

"I don't believe Dick will tell him anything," declared Bowes.

"I know Dick will tell him everything. He'll tell him how he trusted me—how I lured him to the spot of ambush—how I placed him in the light and betrayed him with a prearranged signal—"

She broke off and covered her face with her palms as she stood shuddering.

"My God, Phyllis!" pleaded Bowes, gripping his hands behind him against the longing to take her in his arms. "Let me do something—anything you say!"

"You've already done a lot by just letting me talk to you," she assured him, shaking her head as if to dispel some misty

tangle from before her eyes. "And you can do something more, Cullom—you can find Lloyd Powell and give him a note from me. I must get him away before Joe Carson comes."

"How shall I know him when I see him?"

"I hardly think you can mistake him."

She told Bowes about Speed's pencil portrait. "That would identify him," she added, "but unfortunately I lost it that night, and I've never been able to find it since. I hope to God no one else has found it, who can give it to Dick. My fight's hard enough now. The evidence against me is overwhelming enough already."

"As for me," declared Bowes, "no evidence could ever count against you. If I heard you beg some one to shoot me, I'd know that my ears had lied!"

XXXI

CULLOM BOWES did not find Lloyd Powell, and Phyllis herself, who used the times when she was excluded from the sick room in the same effort, met with no greater success. The old mountaineer was all-seeing, but unseen. From the lips of the woman he knew he would hear only words shaped to defend a human life. That was her feminine instinct of mercy, and he respected it, but he had no intent to hide behind it. It was only by watching her when she did not know she was being watched that he could decide what his duty bid him to do next. Until that question was answered, he was avoiding the mistake he had once made of being seen and talked to by any one.

Then Joe Carson came.

He alighted from the car in which he had driven from Middleboro, after its dusty body had flashed through the village without stopping. He had not paused to make any inquiries on his way. When, tight-lipped and travel-stained, he found himself at the door, he did not yet know whether his journey had ended—whether his destination was a bedside or a grave.

At the threshold stood the white-jacketed figure of Kayami. Though the valet's dark face was otherwise respectfully impassive, the traveler recognized in his beady eyes a shrewd light of expectancy and welcome. It was as if the Japanese had been patiently and confidently waiting ever since he sent his telegram and was ready to render to an acknowledged chief an accounting of his stewardship.

For the briefest interval of time the two men stood there wordless and rigidly motionless. Between them, in the steady meeting of level-eyed glances, there passed something subtler than words—a question, an answer, the declaration of a common cause and a common suspicion. Between them, too, passed something of allegiance demanded and accorded.

In a low voice, almost a whisper, Joe Carson asked:

"Is he—dead?"

"No," replied Kayami. "He alive, but he very sick man."

Out of the round, powerful chest of the Kentuckian the breath ran in an almost sobbing wave of relief. For the instant his set face softened and twitched, and his pent-up nerves relaxed. Then he inquired:

"Can I go to him—now?"

The servant hesitated.

"All night—all day—he not sleep," he said persuasively. "Fever almost burn him up. He fight for breath. Now he sleep. The doctor—"

He paused, and by a gesture conveyed the idea of the hypodermic syringe and its employment.

"If he's still living," said the brother, "I can afford to wait. It's more than I hoped for. Thank God he *is* living!"

Again the two stood silent, and again their eyes met. The Kentuckian knew that the Japanese wanted to talk, and that the things he was aching to say were such things as he dared not volunteer uninvited. Instead of responding at once to that unuttered plea, Joe asked:

"Where is Mrs. Carson?"

He watched Kayami's eyes shrewdly as he put the question, and saw them narrow to slits and brighten into animosity.

"She go 'way to walk—twenty—thirty minutes ago."

Again momentary silence. Then, low-pitched, but with edged tenseness, came the question:

"Kayami, who did this?"

The Japanese started, but at once stifened stoically again.

"Mr. Dick, he tell them—accident," he answered impassively. "Gun go off—accident, he say."

In Joe Carson's eyes there could be seen a scornful repudiation of that assumption, and a peremptory demand for the full truth; but his words came in a softness that was almost gentle.

"What do *you* tell me, Kayami?"

Still ingrained discipline warred with suspicion. Still the habit of the respectful servant combated the eagerness of the hero-worshiper, and lost.

"I bring him in—I tear off his clothes—I wash his wound." He paused, and his voice dropped to a sibilant whisper. "If it's accident, why not any powder burns on those clothes?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed the lawyer dryly. "You mean that he was supposed to have been handling this gun himself when it was discharged, and there were no powder burns?"

The servant nodded his stiff-haired head with emphatic energy.

"Kayami"—the other spoke now with a razor-keen earnestness—"I have one loyalty. Have you more than one?"

The servant shook his head, and his eyes lighted to fanaticism.

"Mr. Dick," he asseverated. "Nobody but Mr. Dick!"

"I think we understand each other. I must know everything you believe or suspect. I am here to punish the guilty. It makes no difference to me who the guilty person is, high or low, man or woman. Do you understand?"

Again the nodded head. Again the instant of hesitation, then the sharply indrawn breath of decision.

Kayami thrust his hand into his jacket pocket, and drew out a crumpled bit of drawing paper bearing a penciled portrait. He thrust this contribution forward with a quick gesture, and this time the ring was in his own voice.

"You ever see that man? You know him?"

Joe Carson took the paper. For a moment, as he held it before his eyes, his own fingers trembled. It was only for a moment, and then his hand grew steady. Kayami, watching the Kentuckian's eyes as shrewdly as a fencer, did not need the low-voiced words:

"Yes, I know him."

"That night, before dinner," testified Kayami, "Mrs. Carson come in. She not know I see her. Her dress torn—her hair rumped. When she dress for dinner, she drop this picture. That same night I find it in her room."

Again a silence, long and pregnant. After it, Joe Carson's face was more inscrutably stony than before. His voice told nothing.

"That's all, Kayami," he said steadily. "Which way did Mrs. Carson go? I think I'll follow."

Once more there was sunset color in the west. Phyllis walked slowly, letting her steps stray with no regulation of their course beyond keeping near to the low boom of the surf. After a little while she found herself passing the ancient windmill, gray-shingled and ivy-coated, where Lawrence Speed was making his vacation abode. The heavy timbers of the sweeps stood gaunt against the sky, and the young woman stopped to gaze at them.

As she paused there, Speed himself appeared in his low-framed door. Seeing her, he came quickly forward.

"How is the patient to-day, Mrs. Carson?" he asked.

Miserably she shook her head.

"He's holding on, thank God, but the crisis lies ahead yet."

"He'll pull through," the artist assured her, with a lightness of tone meant to be heartening.

"Mr. Speed," she inquired somewhat hesitantly, "have you seen your—your old mountaineer friend again?"

The man shook his head.

"I fancy he's passed on," he told her. "He started out late in life to see the world, and he had a good deal of it to see. I find myself thinking of him often. I feel like a boy who has lost a story book."

"Do you know," she said, seeking to speak casually, "I lost your sketch of him, and can't find it anywhere."

"That loss is easily remedied," he smilingly reassured her. "This time you'd better let me make a bit of a study in oil. That will give the old fellow's coloring, as well as his outline of feature."

"No, no!" she answered. In spite of her effort at composure, the refusal came with the agitation of alarm. "No, please don't trouble. I'd much rather have you do me one of your charming landscapes."

"That, too, with pleasure. I'll do both," he said. "And try to ease your heart, my child—your husband will come through all right. It won't be long, now, before we'll all be chatting over our teacups together on your terrace. Then, if by any chance my old *Leatherstocking* should drift this way again, I can bring him over to make a Roman holiday—only you must promise not to laugh at him."

Phyllis flinched under the refined torture of the artist's volatile talk. Perhaps a note of grimness stole into her own voice as she said:

"I don't think any one will laugh at him."

XXXII

It seemed to Phyllis Carson that she walked in a trance as she turned again to her house, in the late light of approaching evening. Something drew her to the edge of the pines, where she had seen the armed figure on that dreadful night, and she halted there, alone and still. The light was fading, and in the woods there was a darkness into which she stood looking, as if searching its shadows for a solution of her problems.

Presently she heard a quiet footfall at her back, and wheeled, startled. A little cry broke from her lips, and her hands went to her breast in a spasmodic gesture of fright and amazement.

It seemed that Dick Carson was standing before her with a face ghastly pale, as if, since she had left his bedside, he had died and come to haunt her. If this was a ghost, it was surely an unforgiving spirit, for eyes, lips, and jaws were set to so remorseless and vindictive a sternness as her husband could scarcely feel for her if his soul had entered the solemn portals of eternity.

The figure remained upright, motionless and wordless, but its eyes held her as if they had the power and the will to dissect the inward processes of her thoughts. Then Phyllis let her hands fall at her sides, and her eyes lost their startled surprise. It was not Dick, of course, but Joe; and before Joe, wearing that hostile front of accusation, she had no wish to stand as one on the defensive.

"I thought," she said in a low voice, "that I was seeing a ghost!"

"They say," declared Joe, in a voice of glacial hardness and coldness, "that the innocent do not see ghosts."

Phyllis had felt as if her burden was more than she could bear. Her heart had seemed to miss two beats out of three, and her knees had threatened to collapse under her; but now, as she faced that accusing figure, whose eyes were silently excoriating her, a tide of indignation rose steadily through her until it glowed in her veins like some powerful and restorative essence. Dick's forgiveness and faith must be won

back, but this interloper could be met only at the sword's point.

The spirit in which Joe Carson had come was as unmistakable as the menace in the eyes of a coiled rattler. He had spoken nine words, but nine hundred could not have told his attitude more clearly. He came charging attempted murder and bent on punishment. He came urged by revenge and attended by the furies; yet he stood quiet, almost unstirring.

"So you have come—again," she said slowly and bitterly.

Very slightly the man inclined his head.

"I have come again," he answered. "Once to be a guest at my brother's marriage—and once to punish his would-be murderer!"

"The marriage," she reminded him, "was full enough of promise until you came. Perhaps he realized how your censoring of his life changed it. I wonder if you're going to serve him as well this time!" The even monotone of her voice broke off, and her chin suddenly snapped up. Her tone altered, not to excited violence, but to a blighting coldness of contempt. "But no!" she added. "If he lives, he'll understand. If he doesn't live, he'll be beyond the meddling of mischievous friends—even of brothers whose devotion carries a curse with it!"

Carson's face, which was already gray with pallor, whitened so that even in the dimness of twilight one could not miss its ashiness. His hands, at his sides, closed themselves into knotted fists, and his tight-shut lips twisted as he drew deep into his chest a long breath and let it hiss out between clenched teeth. Had he been taking the sting of a mule whip across his cheeks and eyes and repressing any outcry of fury or pain, he might have looked the same.

"Perhaps," he said at last, in the strained tone of one who strives for self-command against overpowering emotions, "he'll soon be beyond the need of protectors, and beyond the perfidy of those whom he scorned to distrust. I wish to God I had warned him in time!"

Phyllis had been standing with her back against the broad-girthed bole of a towering spruce—one of the trees that sea captains, in the old days of clipper ships, brought as seedlings from other lands and planted here on Cape Cod until they became the dominant note of the landscape. Now her hand rested against the cool bark

of the great evergreen, and her gaze met his as unflinchingly as a dueling blade. Her lips, gone colorless, shaped the words:

"Warned him of—just what?"

"Warned him," Joe Carson flung back at her, "that this marriage could only bring disaster—though what degree of disaster even I didn't suspect!"

"And just what degree of disaster do you suspect now?"

The man looked at her for an instant with the smoldering eyes of sanity at grips with madness. So she meant to wrap herself about in the mantle of sham bravado and offended innocence! Well, that was logical enough. It remained to be seen whether she had in her such metal as could endure the ordeal to the finish, or whether she would crumble under the white heat to which the Kentuckian meant to subject her pretenses.

"I no longer suspect anything," he responded. "I know now, and you know I know!"

"What?" she insisted.

For the first time Joe Carson flung out his clenched hands and let the flame burst through the repressed smoldering of his fury.

"Why do we quibble?" he demanded passionately. "Do you think you can hide your damnable guilt behind question marks? You're the wife and I'm the brother of a man who has been infamously shot down. I loved him. You married him—and tried to have him murdered. I'm not mincing words with you. Why should you mince them with me?"

This time it was the woman who flinched under the brutally direct charge as if the lash had been laid upon her; but her recovery was instant, and from her eyes rained a fire of wrath and disdain.

"So that's it!" she said. "You charge me with a guilty knowledge of Dick's wounding, and—"

The words caught in her throat, strangling her into momentary silence. She had had to suffer too long in silence. Now at least she could fight. She took a step forward and stood trembling with an agony of indignation, so close to him that the breath from her mouth mingled with his.

"And it's the blackest lie ever told or thought!" she cried out. "For one moment of a man's strength, to crush your vile accusations down your throat. I think I'd sell my soul!"

Carson drew back, and wheeled from her. At that instant he dared not trust himself to look at her, or to feel the nearness of a presence that was inciting him so mightily to madness; but that retreat of a single stride was the only concession he could make. He turned on her again, with a low and bitter laugh of derision.

"I wish, too—that you were a man," he declared. "My God, what poor creatures of habit we are!" His fingers writhed in his two clenched hands, and his knuckles showed out white. "You stand there before me safe enough, and you know it, because I'm a slave to the tradition of a woman's immunity. Your clever woman's brain and your beautiful woman's body lured my brother to the edge of death. If you were a man, I could tear you limb from limb, and enjoy the task!"

Phyllis Carson flung back her head in provocative defiance.

"Why don't you do it?" she taunted. "You have the animal strength. What has chivalry to do with you, if you can grovel so despicably low as even to think the things you've said to me?"

She was depending on no tree trunk for support now, but was standing like some spirit of Amazon fury, wrapped in the flame of wrath.

"I might as reasonably accuse you of trying to kill your brother—more reasonably," she swept on. "You brought to our wedding accusations and slanders. You weren't too chivalrous for that—so why quibble? You can kill me with your bare hands, but you can't frighten me!"

"No," admitted Joe Carson, with something like a return to his old composure. "I don't believe I can frighten you. It seems there are some forms of infamy that don't involve cowardice." He paused, then went relentlessly on. "I believe I could send you to the electric chair, though, if this thing ends fatally. The illogic of modern chivalry wouldn't forbid my doing it; yet even that wouldn't satisfy me!"

Meeting his eyes with defiant disdain, she ignored this declaration as if she had not heard it.

"I believe I could throw you into court and convict you of instigating this murderous assault," he insisted. "There would be no sentimental mawkishness to hold me back; but the name you wear is my brother's. Even if that didn't tie my hands, there's a bigger thing."

"I don't know," she said with white-hot contempt, when he paused, "why I should care what goes on in your mind, unless it is that, next to love, hatred makes one curious. What is the other thing?"

Joe Carson drank in a long breath before he answered.

"It's the undying fire that burns in Wiley blood," he told her. "It's a fire that doesn't spurt fitfully or waver, but lives on through generations, loyal to its loves and loyal to its hates!" He paused, and the tone that had softened meditatively snapped again into the staccato of musketry. "It's a code of ethics that doesn't shoulder off upon judges and juries a mortal hurt to a man's honor. It's a spirit that attends to unforgivable insult for itself!"

Phyllis Carson stood looking level-eyed at her brother-in-law. Her lips curled bitterly, and she shrugged her shoulders. Her anger had exhausted itself.

"This is your brother's house," she said; "but I am my own mistress. You accuse me of a thing I disdain to deny. Choose your way of making war on me, and begin—the sooner the better; but until then don't talk to me. That's a command, and I'll find ways of enforcing it."

"Will you enforce it with your hired assassins?" he inquired. "With your imported Powell kinsmen?"

She had turned her back upon him with a gesture of dismissal, but at that taunt she wheeled to face him again, and once more her eyes rained torrents of lightning.

"That's another lie!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean by it?"

"I've told you that your sex protects you," answered Carson steadily; "but it doesn't afford amnesty to the poor creatures who take their orders from you. Punishing your hirelings can't give me full satisfaction, but it will be something!"

"I know what suspicions you're nursing," she retorted; "but you have no facts. This isn't a country in which you and your clan can raid courthouses and commit mob murders!"

She stopped. The man came a step nearer.

"I do know," he said meaningly, "that you received a message from a protégé whom you got out of prison. I know that he asked you what he could do for you. Your reply to that question is the only link lacking in my chain; but the next link is the fact of Dick's shooting."

"But you *do* lack that essential link in your chain, and before you can proceed, you must establish it."

Joe Carson shook his head.

"One might suppose that you would think with the feud mind, having transplanted feud methods here on Cape Cod. You overlook the fact that I'm not running to sheriffs and courthouses for help. I'm acting for myself, and all I need is to be, as we would say in the hills, 'plumb, dead sartain.' I am almost certain now. Lloyd Powell is only a pawn, but—"

Abruptly her hands came out, and her words choked in her throat.

"This is Massachusetts," she cried out. "This isn't Hemlock Mountain!"

"You remember that too late," he retorted grimly. "With me such things aren't matters of geography."

"I'm willing to have you make war on me," she exclaimed, but the man recognized a break in the impregnability of her confidence. "I'm willing to fight you to the end, without quarter; but when you turn your warfare on me into a persecution of others—"

"I believe you ordered me out of your presence," he interrupted. "I'll go now. I said my certainty about old Lloyd was almost established. It needed only your frightened note of pleading for him to make it absolute. Now I have only to find him!"

She started after the Kentuckian, as he strode away without looking back. She even called to him, but he paid no attention. He went deliberately along the lawn until he reached and entered the house—where Kayami stood, as if waiting for him, at the door.

Phyllis stared helplessly, and with a sudden reaction her knees weakened under her. She sat wearily down, with her face clasped in her hands.

"Poor devoted old fool!" she moaned, as she thought of the man against whom Joe's vengeance was about to launch itself. "I wonder where my duty lies now! If he's gone home, I might send some sort of warning. I wonder!"

It was almost dark, but the grayness that comes before full night was not yet blackness. The moon had not risen. It was an impalpable, cloistered sort of dimness in which she sat, when a hand fell lightly on her shoulder, and, looking up with a start, she saw standing before her old Lloyd Powell himself.

He stood with his shapeless felt hat hanging in his hand. His eyes, as he looked down, were benign, and in their kindness one sought in vain for the perverted fire of the assassin.

Phyllis came to her feet, and leaned limply against the tree for support. A horror of exchanging speech with him, a repulsion from touching the hand that had pressed the trigger, swept over her and nauseated her. She could feel that in some essential way, almost beyond human analysis, this man was clean-hearted, and yet the guilt of hell hung about him.

It was hard to speak, but, whatever she had felt before its occurrence, the interview with Joe Carson made speech imperative. Lloyd Powell had made his ghastly mistake out of fealty to her. She must at least warn him now.

"You—you must go away," she said faintly.

Old Lloyd shook his head.

"I fared up hyar ter help ye," he said in slow, almost drawling earnestness; "an' hit 'pears like I hain't got done yit. I heard what speech passed betwixt ye an' lawyer Carson, an' hit come ter be needful fer me ter hev speech with ye likewise."

"Please go away before some one sees you!" she almost screamed. "Your life's in terrible danger, and there has been mischief enough already." The cumulative strain was driving her to the margin of hysteria, and her voice rose shrilly. "I know you meant it in kindness, but oh, my God, didn't you hear me tell him I loved him?"

She stopped, still gasping from her effort to control the rising tide of emotion. The old man stretched out a hand and laid it on her elbow. She flinched from the contact as if it had stung or scalded her, but he went steadily on.

"Yes, I heard ye, an' I hearkened ter ye, too. Thet's why I didn't shoot—twill later on."

"But later on—you did shoot," she wailed, "and that shot ruined my life!"

"I'd done come ter kill him, because I 'lowed hit war the only way ter sot ye free, an' ye seemed ter be in a woeful plight."

Phyllis found it impossible to look into those deep and steady eyes and doubt their sincere honesty. Truth stamped the old man's face as convincingly as the mint mark stamps standard gold.

"I seed ye throw yore arms round about his neck, an' I heared ye 'low ye loved him

an' thet his foes was yore foes; an' straight-way I reckoned I'd done erred."

His voice had the quieting influence of gently flowing water, and the girl, standing there with shaken spirit, felt its strength envelop and fortify her.

"I seed thet I'd done erred," went on the mountaineer, in the quaint idiom that to another hearer might almost have required interpretation. "I unroosted my rifle-gun an' drew back. I'd done come ter kill Mr. Carson, but hit 'peared like atter all God hed done released me. I guv Him thanks." He paused again, and shook his head in melancholy remembrance as he added: "But then I seed ye war jest a seekin' ter fo'ce yore heart, an' couldn't compass hit. I seed thet I was bounden ter sot ye free, an' so I shot him; an' I kain't no fashion fathom why the shot warn't a deadener."

"And now—" she gasped, but broke off in a sob, unable to finish.

"Now hit don't seem like my task is over, atter all," the old man went on sadly. "Hit 'pears like ye've got two enemies, 'stid of jest one, makin' warfare on ye; an' I had need ter talk with ye."

"No, no!" she exhorted him, catching at the rusty lapels of his coat in the excitement of her mental reaction. "No—you can only serve me by keeping out of Joe Carson's way. Don't you see that you've done enough? Go away now where you'll be safe!"

Lloyd Powell shook his head.

"Hit hain't jest ter say my manner of doin' ter flee because a Wiley's done made threats ergin me," he announced with a slow finality. "Ef we meets in the highway, I don't ask nothin' of him save my full half of the road—thet's all."

XXXIII

PHYLLIS saw Kayami come to the lighted door of the house and look about him, peering into the dusk. Already she thought of him as Joe Carson's spy; and now she began to dread him with an urgent and acute terror.

As yet Kayami had not seen her or her companion there in the shadows, and after a moment he turned away. In an access of alarm, the young woman laid her hands on the old man's shoulders.

"Listen!" she commanded tensely. "You've said that when I needed you, I had only to say so. I need you now—I

need desperately that you should do just what I ask, without stopping to question or argue."

He nodded as if all this was a matter of course, and responded soberly:

"I'm hearkenin' ter ye. Jest bid me what ter do. I'm full ready."

"If I don't go in now," she hurried on, "they'll come out to hunt for me. Give me your pledge that you won't let Joe Carson see you until I've talked with you again. Promise me that until then you'll let him have the whole of the road, if necessary!"

Her earnestness and haste gave so tumultuous a stress to her manner that the unflurried calmness of Lloyd Powell's response pointed a sharp contrast.

"I give ye my hand on hit," he assured her quietly. "When I 'lowed I aimed ter hold my half of the road, I didn't mean ter say I wouldn't act prudent enough ter do what ye wants. Meanwhile I'm a hidin' out in thet old stable by the empty dwellin' house acrost yon patch of woods. Hit's jest a whoop an' a holler distant from hyar."

Phyllis made a final effort at persuasion in words that raced excitedly.

"Most of all, I want you to go away," she pleaded. "I want you to go far enough away to be safe!"

"An' leave ye hyar fer Joe Carson ter hound ye ter the penitentiary, or mayhap inter some madhouse?"

"Joe Carson can't touch me!" Her voice sounded a note of scorn, then broke abruptly to fear. "But I'm desperately afraid of what he can do to you."

"Don't suffer thet ter affright ye none," he advised quietly. "He's jest a faith-breakin' Wiley—thet's all."

"But I want you to go away—I want it desperately!"

The old man stood dubiously thoughtful for a while, then shook an obdurate head.

"I've done said I'd do anything ye bade me do," he acknowledged; "an' I will do any manner of thing, save only ter desert ye in sore peril. I've heard Joe Carson threaten ye, an' I knows Joe Carson's breed. When I come hyar, I didn't skeercely ever expect ter go back alive nowadays; but I come, nonetheless, an' so long as ye must still need me I reckon I'll kinderly tarry near ye."

Again in the open door flashed the white jacket of the Japanese, and the woman gave up in despair. How could she hope to over-

come an obstinacy which counted the sacrifice of life as a negligible thing? She turned and left him, for it was night now, and her husband's brother might already be inaugurating his unsparing warfare under her own roof.

But Dick still slept, and Joe was restively pacing the living room with a cloudy face. As Phyllis entered, she paused and spoke to the Kentuckian, and in her manner there was no visible sign of either rancor or passion.

"As I said before," Phyllis reminded him, "this is your brother's house. He would want you to stay here, I think. I'll have your room prepared."

Carson bowed. His manner, too, held the outward form of courtesy which civilized life exacts.

"Thank you," he responded gravely, "but I had meant to stop at the inn."

"I know that ordinarily you couldn't break bread with a Powell, and that you prefer to choose the roof that shelters you," she said simply. "Ordinarily I, too, prefer to choose my guests; but Dick lies in the shadow of death, and he would want you here."

Joe Carson hesitated, and then said shortly:

"So be it. Neither of us can consult our own wishes."

Dr. Merton came and went, while the Kentuckian nursed his impatience where he was. When the physician's car had rolled away, Phyllis came back.

"Dr. Merton says I may take you up," she told him. "Dick knows you're coming, and he's eager to see you."

The two stood alone, and despite his attitude of antipathy toward her Joe Carson could not help paying Phyllis a silent and unwilling tribute. It was not merely to her beauty, though that was undeniable, and seemed to be enhanced by a sort of spirit magic. What gave him pause was the superb composure with which she treated him after their wrathful meeting of two hours ago, after his abrupt declaration of war and her tempestuous acceptance of it.

In her he encountered the warrior strain, and he tacitly saluted it. Even in bitter hatred she could preserve an almost regal self-control, and Joe Carson could drop his spear point in acknowledgment of that quality in foe as well as friend.

He bowed and moved toward the stairs. With her hand on the rail, Phyllis paused

again, and he was compelled to halt until she gave him room to pass.

"I shall take you to him now and leave you with him," she said. "You two will want to be alone together; but remember that he is weak, and his life is still in doubt. He can't stand much."

The Kentuckian's eyes narrowed. He felt himself being unjustly forced into a brutal attitude.

"I'll strive not to tax his strength too far," he answered; "but perhaps he'll want to bequeath to me certain tasks that he can't undertake for himself—certain tasks that he couldn't intrust to any one else."

"I understand," she answered, but her voice remained calm. "You mean you think he will want you to launch bolts of vengeance on Lloyd Powell—and on me. I'm asking no quarter for myself. Please realize that; but I know how frail his strength is, and I do ask consideration for his weakness."

"God knows I don't want to overtax him," protested Dick's brother; "but there may be a weight on his heart that he wants to unburden—a weight that's hurting him more than the excitement of talk or the pain of sickness. If that's true, I have no choice but to listen."

"You must judge of that," she admitted; "but I shan't be there to caution you, so I'm doing it now."

"You had better be present," Joe said almost reflectively. "What I have to say will concern you. You may wish to contradict me."

Phyllis twisted her lips into a smile both hopeless and ironical.

"Say what you like," she gave full permission. "I shan't be there to listen."

She turned quickly, leaving him no opportunity of response, and led the way to the stairhead.

Inside the door Joe paused for a breathing space, then crossed the floor quickly but noiselessly, and dropped to his knees by his brother's bedside.

For an instant he was unable to speak. As both his hands closed greedily over the hot and fevered one that lay so inertly outside the covers, a dry and broken sob sounded horribly in his throat. He had journeyed hither nerved to find that death had outstripped him in his race, and the sight of his brother still alive had unmanned him. For a shaken moment, the face on the pillow was more composed than his own.

Looking over Joe Carson's bowed head, as his weak fingers sought to return the pressure of greeting, Dick's glance met and engaged that of his wife, who had paused on the threshold as she was about to leave the room. The sick man's eyes lighted fitfully, and his lips stirred.

"Phyllis, don't go!" he whispered.

Joe came to his feet and stood by the bedside. His moment of spasmodic weakness had passed. He gazed down on his brother's face, which was drawn to a parchmentlike leanness, white except for the fever spots, and seamed with the furrows of suffering.

"I'm here, Dick, old boy," he said, with a pitifully forced smile. "I'll be here until you're on your feet again. The doctor says you mustn't exert yourself, and there's time enough to talk hereafter."

Dick looked up into the face above him and shook his head. A gesture of his limp hand commanded the other to speak. While Joe hesitated, the sick man said weakly:

"I've been waiting for you—all this while. There may not be any—hereafter."

It was the nurse who came forward, almost bustlingly authoritative.

"I'm going to give you a few minutes to chat," she said; "but let the visitor do the talking. Our patient must hold his speaking breath."

Even the few words of greeting had taxed the invalid. Dick's face twitched to a paroxysm of pain and exhaustion, and his short, nervously flurried breath was gasping after the effort. He waited until the nurse had gone, and the room held only the three sharers of the feudal secret. Phyllis, who tarried in reluctant obedience to her husband's command, stood as far away as the space of the chamber permitted.

"Talk," commanded Dick faintly.

Brief and low as that exhortation was, it was an imperative one, and Joe Carson responded without hesitation.

"I came to be with you, Dick," he fervently asserted, "because I love you as I love nothing else in life. If you have work for me to do, I'm here to do it." His voice broke in agitation. "My God, boy, I'd cross hell barefoot for you!"

The sick and feverish face on the pillow gave back from its eyes a responsive affection, but even through that expression they held their undeviating insistence of inquiry.

"They say you were hurt in an accident, Dick," went on the other, "and that you

yourself made that statement for the public ear. I understand it and second it for the public ear, but"—there was a dramatic pause—"but I'm not the public, and whatever you choose to tell others I know the accident pretext is nothing but a lie. I know you were struck down infamously, and from ambush!"

Joe Carson's voice fell abruptly silent. The wounded man stirred painfully, while his breath came shallow and hot, but his masklike face made no response. Just inside the door, standing wordless and overwrought, Phyllis waited. She supposed that she had been held here to listen while sentence was pronounced upon her, and now the blade of wrath hung uplifted and poised.

It had pleased the man whose whole love had turned to hatred to withhold his destructive bolt once before, when she had stood uncovered to its launching. She had understood that reprieve. Dick was waiting for the arrival of his chosen deputy and substitute. Now the avenging angel had come, and the bolt was only stronger and more destructive for its long leashing. Now it would surely fall!

There was an unbearable interval of silence. Then Joe went on:

"If you recover, you're your own man, Dick; but if you die, I must be your man. The same father begot us, Dick, and the same mother bore us. The hand that was raised against you struck at me, too. My one work in life now is to avenge you, and I'm here!"

He paused again, and still there was only an uncommunicative blankness on the other face.

Phyllis bore the suspense as long as she could, and then she spoke, for the first time, from her place by the door. Her voice came faintly yet steadfastly, and with no hint of quavering; and at its sound Joe wheeled almost defensively to face her.

"You forget, Joe," she said, "that he mustn't talk. If you have suspicions or facts that you want him to confirm, you must state them. If you want him to tell you whom you are to punish, you must name the guilty ones. Let him confirm you with a nod. It shouldn't need words."

The man at the bedside stood gazing at the slender woman in fresh amazement. There was no trace of bravado in her manner, and yet she was challenging him to accuse her. Something in her eyes told him that she did so without hope of vindication,

that she did so knowing in advance what the result must be.

Joe had ridden boldly through a territory peopled by his enemies to reach this place, but that had required no such absolute courage as this unexpected conduct of hers. From his brother he had, as yet, received no hint of confirmation for his own damaging conviction, but in Phyllis's face he read the sure expectation of that confirmation. He turned back to the bed to receive it.

"You've heard what she says," declared Joe, forcing his words. "You've heard what she says, and I'll follow her suggestion. I accuse Lloyd Powell of coming here to murder you, and of firing the shot that wounded you. Is that true?"

The head on the pillow looked from the face at the bedside to that at the door, and back again to that by the bedside, but it neither nodded in assent nor shook in negation. It ignored the question with the noncommittal blankness of a plaster mask.

During a heavily freighted silence the breast of the accuser heaved to the stress of his breathing. Then he spoke again, this time low, with an arctic coldness and hardness.

"Until you gave any other man the right to say such a thing, Dick, I'd kill him for hinting it; but I have no interest save yours, and my life belongs to you. I must be starkly honest, because I'm here to avenge you. I accuse your wife of calling on Lloyd Powell to murder you—of procuring him as her agent in assassination. Is that true? For God's sake, answer me!"

Before Phyllis's eyes swam changeable spots of giddiness. Her knees seemed to weaken, and the color ebbed out of her face. One hand strayed to her bosom, but except for that gesture she neither spoke nor moved. She only waited, and as she waited the head on the pillow vouchsafed no indication of either assent or denial.

It refused to move in confirmation or negation, but in its eyes broke and snapped a sudden fire, such as she had seen in them before—a fire that made of each optic a crater in eruption; and the shallow breathing quickened.

"Dick," said the standing man to the man in the bed, "no Wiley can be treacherously struck down like that and go unavenged—you least of all, while I live. Your silence is assent. I have my answer. Look at that!"

He drew from his pocket a crumpled paper. Phyllis, with a shock of despair, recognized it as the sketch which Speed had made of Lloyd Powell, and which she had searched for in vain since its losing.

"That," declared the accuser, "is a rough portrait of Lloyd Powell, who ambushed you. I don't know what hand sketched it, but it was sketched from life—presumably here—and under the initials in the corner is a date."

He held the thing forward, and the wounded man saw it. Dick Carson must have recognized it as a presentment of the face he had looked into once, for a brief but pregnant moment, in the moonlight. He closed his eyes and stirred uneasily under his coverings.

Joe turned to face the woman against whom he was presenting such an indictment. She remained motionless, as if she were looking into the far reaches of death, but she did not quail. Her accuser addressed his next words to her.

"I charge," he said, "that you must have known on that date, which was the date of my brother's shooting, of this man's presence, and that you gave no warning. I charge that you knew not only that he was here, but that he came in answer to your call. Can you deny those charges?"

Phyllis did not answer. She still stood rigid, and it was from the bed that the next words sounded in low-toned and dominating vibrance.

"Don't talk to her—talk to me!"

"Very well!" The Kentuckian wheeled again. "Then I say to you that I accept my duty. You shall be avenged!"

The face on the pillow was suddenly swept by a flood of powerful emotion. The wounded man's weakness seemed to disappear under an outburst of some inner force, and the supine body raised itself, with eyes blazing.

"For God's sake, quit it!" exclaimed Dick Carson in a voice of astonishing strength. "My life is my own. You have meddled too much. Quit it, I tell you!"

Joe had bent over the figure that was borne up on that gusty impulse of protest, but the weak hand sought to sweep him away. As it fell back limply, the Kentuckian dropped to his knees and covered his face with his hands.

"When I want you to interfere," the sick man went on with feebly ebbing ferocity, "I'll tell you. Meanwhile—"

But before he could finish his head turned and he lay insensible on the pillow.

XXXIV

AGAIN that night Dr. Merton watched long at Dick Carson's bedside, and once more it seemed that the assaults of death would not be stayed. When the vigil had stretched through hours, he rose and looked down on his patient, who lay in a coma, with the distressed heaving of a breast burdened with stagnant blood and the creeping fires of fever.

"We've caught him back once more," he said seriously. "He had slipped close to the edge. Even such a happy excitement as seeing his brother was almost too much for him."

Joe Carson looked at Phyllis, and Phyllis at him. As they had stood awaiting the issue of the battle in which they must remain noncombatants, no word had passed between them. The busy physician had seen no hint of hearts dedicated to implacable hatred for each other. It was as if for once an issue had arisen that stilled their animosities, a crisis that overshadowed their resentments.

Now, perhaps, the man, whose steady self-command had often faced severer testings, could not have concealed his emotions had the physician spoken directly to him, instead of to the woman; but Phyllis smiled her answer, wanly, yet with a magnificent composure.

"Joe," she said, "had come a long way to reach his brother's bedside, and Dick wouldn't wait."

"No, I understand that."

They went, in a procession of three, down the stairs, and stood in silence as the doctor passed out of the door. Across the infinite stretches of salt water a breeze was flinging landward wet streamers of fog. The mist thickened the darkness that lies between midnight and dawn with a dispiriting chill. Through it came hoarsely the distant voice of foghorns along dangerous stretches of shoal and sand bar.

Left there alone, the two still stood. It seemed that something must be said before they parted. It was Phyllis who broke the silence, in a voice so calm that gentleness, rather than wrath, seemed to inspire it.

"I let the doctor think we were friends," she said slowly. "We understand each other so clearly that we needn't burn bonfires to show our animosity, need we?"

"No," he answered in the same quiet tone. "It needs no advertisement, and Dick's wishes must be respected."

"To outside eyes," Phyllis went on, "we needn't parade it, I think. I stand as the wife of the man whose blood is also your blood. I can't bear to flaunt before the world the wounds that I must bear—because, whether you choose to believe it or not, I love him."

"I don't believe it," Joe answered. "But that's our own affair."

He paused, and his white face worked spasmodically. He had his own conceptions of fighting fair, and he could not act dishonorably, even though he thought he was fighting a faithless and treasonable enemy. His code required him to make another acknowledgment, and, though it came hard, he made it stanchly.

"It's not out of mere acrimony that I say I don't believe you," he explained. "It's because honesty demands that I should keep my position clear. Otherwise I should be only a persecutor. For all my belief in your infamy, I bow to your courage. I think you are not only the falsest but also the most superbly fearless human being I've ever seen!"

"Thank you," she acknowledged curtly.

Outside, in the fog, Joe Carson walked the night out, up and down, up and down, where the faint and blurred light of the sick room window could be held in view through the mist, like a pallid beacon. From the tree branches came the constant drip of moisture, like rain. He was thinking how burdensome that heavy wetness was making the air for enfeebled and tortured lungs to breathe; but he was thinking of other things, too.

His brother had repudiated him, had denied him full confidence, as if even now the spell which this woman had cast over Dick held him in its soft mesh. The woman had faced his accusations without faltering, though her eyes had proclaimed that she met them without hope. It was the sheer gallantry of an inborn courage. Despite Joe Carson's stinging hunger for reprisal, something in him answered to that dauntlessness as viking blood might answer to the flaming challenge of a Valkyrie.

"How can God permit such damnable contradictions in human nature?" he demanded fiercely. "Why should beauty and courage be linked with unspeakable villainess in one human being? I've never seen her

in a softened mood. I've never felt the smile of friendliness in her eyes, except for a few minutes on her wedding day; and yet I can see how most men would be powerless to resist her. Even I—"

He broke off abruptly and clenched his hands.

"I know how infamous she is. My hatred is righteous and enduring, and yet even I have to brace myself against insidious doubts of her guilt!"

Inside, Phyllis sat motionless, with eyes that stared dumbly ahead, and with her hands locked on her knees. Kayami, who had not been in his bed that night, slipped in and kindled a blaze of pine fagots on the fire dogs. Orange and vermilion reflections played upon the pale curve of her cheek and set a nimbus around her soft hair. In such a light her beauty was enhanced to an appealing wistfulness; but there was no one there to pay it the tribute of merited admiration.

Her thoughts shaped themselves fantastically into pictures in the fire, and the whole grim portraiture of mountain feudalism spread itself to her imagination. She saw men of two families, or perhaps of one family divided, who through decades and generations went on distrusting, hating, and killing; women cheated of their youth by the tight cramp of fear at the heart; children suckled to a heritage of bitterness.

These things she saw, with the high hills that framed them in somber magnificence and made them possible. The isolation of steep heights kept that fierce spirit alive, as a chimney holds and fosters a fire which, in an open place, would scatter its ashes and die. Now that spirit was seeking to invade the salt spits and sand dunes of Cape Cod; and it was hard to see how it could pass, after even a momentary visitation, without leaving other wakes of tragedy in its going.

Again she seemed to feel the blistering heat of Dick Carson's hatred filling the heart that had been a lover's, like poison in a well of erstwhile sweet water. She felt, too, the black menace of her brother-in-law's presence. In spite of herself, an involuntary feeling of admiration acknowledged his inherent strength and sincerity. If only it had been possible for her to fill her life and Dick's with a love animated by such hurricane force as gave power to the hatreds that surcharged the air about her, then life would indeed have been an amazing adventure. She would have found

no tame paradise in such intensities, but a sort of Valhalla, wild in its ecstasy.

Instead, her love had failed her, and the superlatives of intensity had revealed themselves only in hate. Joe Carson was here and old Lloyd Powell was here—actors on a stage set for a series of tragedies. She shuddered, for all the warmth of the blazing logs.

Those two men who, far from home, personified the deadly spirit of the feud were hardly a quarter of a mile apart, and at their first meeting one of them would die—perhaps both. The characters in the piece were assembled, the stage was set, and the spirit of doom overhung it. The future, if she could read it, was heavy with menace, for such fires destroy everything in their course, leaving only black cinder and white ash.

It was at the edge of dawn when the man, haggard of aspect and drenched with moisture, entered the door again and saw Phyllis still sitting before a dying fire, where he had left her. She turned her face slowly, and he looked into eyes deeply ringed and pitifully weary; but in them he read no surrender.

He paused uncertainly, with an expression on his own face which, for the first time in his life, hinted at a premonition of defeat.

"Yesterday," he said, "I came declaring war on you to the end, without quarter. Now I come offering you terms."

She only shook her head.

"You challenged and I accepted," she replied. "There can't be any terms between us."

Joe Carson kicked the fire into a renewed blazing, and stood on the hearth. His tall body sagged at the shoulders, and his fine erectness drooped.

"When we talked there at the edge of the woods," he explained, "I had been thinking of Dick as certain to die, and that didn't leave me any alternative except to avenge him."

"Yes," she said in a still voice. "So you said."

"But now," he went on, "I've seen him. I don't know what hold you have over him that could outlive such treachery, but I recognize your power."

"And so you speak of granting me terms?"

"God knows," he exclaimed in a shaken and anguished voice, "it isn't pleasant to

stand here trying to browbeat a woman. God knows I don't do things like that from choice. You had my brother. His heart and his life were all yours, in the fullness of health and strength and spirit. You didn't want him. You tried to throw it all away—by assassination. Now I beg you to give me back what's left—the ragged tatters of his life."

"What have I to give back to any one?"

"You have that inexplicable hold over him—a hold that I can't break. You have the power, it seems, to stay in his life like a poison, unless you take yourself out of it and give him a chance to forget you."

He paused, and his voice broke in a dry sob.

"Let me take the broken wreck of a man that lies up there, and try to nurse him back to some pale semblance of what he was. Give him that slender chance, which he can have only by forgetting you and your betrayal!"

"How can I do that?"

"You can do it by leaving him—by going out of the life that you tried to destroy. You had him, and you threw him away like a rag. Let me have back what's left of him!"

Phyllis came slowly to her feet, and stood looking incredulously into the beseeching face.

"You mean," she whispered indignantly, "that I shall go away and let him live or die without fighting to win back his love? Do you mean that?"

"You didn't want him when you brought your man to kill him. I only ask you to give me what you tried to throw away."

"You claim him and death claims him," she said in a whisper that was more eloquent than a thundering vehemence. "But I want him, too—I want him more than both of you combined. I want him so much that I'm willing to fight both you and death, and then to fight the hatred in his own heart."

"I ask you, for his sake, to go away and give him a chance to forget," urged Joe. "Do that, and I'm willing to surrender everything else—even to let your murder henchman go scot-free. I'll do anything, if only you'll give me back the wreck of my brother!"

"You volunteered as an avenger last night," she reminded him, "and Dick declined you."

Joe flinched, as if in acceptance of a blow that he could not resent.

"Yes, my brother rebuked me, because of the hold you still have over him; but he believed me. You know that in your own heart."

"He refused to confirm your charges."

"But he didn't deny them. Had he been able to deny them, he would have flamed up in your defense. God knows it—and you know it, too. Dick believes as I do—in your guilt."

Phyllis wearily nodded her head.

"Yes," she said slowly. "Yes, he believes what you believe—and both of you are wrong."

"You say that you love him, in spite of the fact that he believes you guilty, and yet you denounced me as wholly vile for holding the same conviction!"

For once the ghost of a pallid smile lifted one corner of her lips.

"Oh," she declared, with a woman's cryptic clairvoyance, "your hate was always hate, but Dick's is only love gone wrong."

"Right or wrong, it has almost destroyed him, because of what you did; and now you want it back in caprice, as you threw it away in caprice. You've had your chance. In God's name give me mine!"

She shook her head.

"His love has gone wrong," she said, "but I'm going to bring it back. I'm going to fight for it to my last breath. I'm going to stay here with him till he wins out. I'm going to fight for him—to fight for him against death and you!"

Dick's brother let his hands fall nervelessly at his sides, then braced himself and straightened.

"You had that portrait," he accused. "You knew in advance that the murderer was coming—that he had come—and a word from you would have stopped him. Can you meet that charge?"

"I'm not meeting any charge from you," she declared. "I'm not defending myself against you, and I'm not making terms with you. Between us, it was to be war without quarter!"

There was a pause. Then, in a hardened and steady voice, the brother declared:

"Dick has the right to deal with you, if you won't give me the chance to salvage his broken life; but to-day I mean to find your henchman—and kill him!"

(To be concluded in the February number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

The Hands of Men

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE REALISTIC STORY OF A GIRL'S ADVENTURES AMONG THE BRIGHT LIGHTS OF NEW YORK

By Henry Payson Dowst

Author of "Father Was Right"

IN the year 1842, in a remote town of up-State New York, there was born one Greenbriar Sears, a child of humble but sagacious parents, who were farseeing enough to know that if you want your children to grow rich you must not leave them a fortune. Sons often inherit wealth, but seldom the capacity for earning it. In the big handicap of life the lads who start from scratch almost invariably lead under the wire.

Perhaps it all comes to the same thing in the end. Either you live miserably and die rich, or you have a good time and bequeath your heirs a sunny disposition and the whole round world to make a living in. No matter how much you have ten seconds before the Great Referee starts the last count, you have exactly nothing ten seconds after he has finished. Back you go to scratch again, to begin your race all over in your next incarnation—if there is any truth in the doctrine of reincarnation.

Greenbriar Sears was a scratch man who overhauled the field and left his nearest competitor far behind him, gasping for breath. For many years he piled up assets as a mason lays bricks, by outguessing other men in Wall Street. It can be done, if you know how. Greenbriar found out that the way to know how was to be on the inside. He had a weasel's skill in getting there. Guessing, with him, in his palmy days, was about as hazardous as betting that the sun would rise once in twenty-four hours.

When Greenbriar, after a long career of prosperity, reached the number of years allotted to the average human being, he was still doing business with all the vigor of a man half his age. I said vigor, however, not judgment. It sometimes happens so.

He owned railroads and steamships and mills and mines. Rude and predatory persons, who had no respect for the name of Sears or for the gray hairs of Greenbriar, inconsiderately separated him from these assets by processes known to the scientists who, in the financial laboratories of lower Manhattan, outdo the alchemists. The alchemists sought only to turn baser metals into gold, but the rude Wall Street persons turn water into paper and paper into coin, and then turn the pockets of elderly has-beens like Greenbriar Sears inside out.

When the old gentleman found he had been trimmed, he admitted he had been a fool to stay in the game after advancing years had undermined his powers. He thought, however, that he might "come back," now that he had nothing to lose and everything to gain; so he haunted the brokers' offices, watched the stock quotations, and gambled pikingly on margin. As a result, he was always broke, always hopeful, and always an expense to Florida.

Florida was Greenbriar's daughter. She was twenty-four years old, and had been named after the native State of her mother, who had been dead at least ten years.

Let me tell you a little about Florida.

She always had her breakfast in bed, until—

She always had her choice of motors at any time of day, until—

She always bought her clothes at the most expensive places, and had them charged to her father, until—

She thought she was always going to be able to do these things, until—

Greenbriar Sears went broke.

Florida Sears was fundamentally a sensible, practical girl, made into a rather indolent, easy-going, imperious, thoughtless,

kind-hearted, superficial nonentity by a life of irresponsibility and unlimited luxury. She not only had everything that money could buy, but in addition she had everything that being the most beautiful girl in New York could bring her.

Of course, when I speak of her as the most beautiful girl in New York, it is necessary to qualify. I cannot describe Florida in a way that will make you see her accurately. She had brown eyes of extraordinary warmth and expression, and brown hair with a tint of gold in it. Her face was a rather full oval, and she had dimples.

Her figure was slender—we-ell, she hoped it was. Perhaps she deceived herself the merest trifle in this respect. If Florida had been given to riding and tennis and other outdoor exertions, she might readily have been as straight-lined as any girl not actually thin; but she merely went through some very perfunctory exercises in the morning, and took a cool—not really cold—bath. Result, a healthy appetite, a good color, and the general appearance of well-being; but not the lean, hard grace of the girl athlete.

Let us be impartially truthful. Florida Sears wasn't plump, but she was delicately curvilinear. She was not exactly sumptuous, but almost so.

The things that happened to poor Florida might in some circles be called "a judgment on her" for a remark she made in the hearing of two or three friends who were unkind enough to remember it. One of these friends was getting up a subscription in the interest of a club for young working girls. She described it as a place where they could be made to feel at home, where they could entertain their men friends decently, dance, amuse themselves, and—so said the philanthropic solicitor—keep away from temptation.

"Yes," said Florida cheerfully, "I'll give you something. I'm glad to. It's fine to give them a place where they can enjoy themselves; but I confess I don't see where the temptation comes in. These girls are all self-supporting, aren't they?"

"Why, yes—the club isn't a home or a retreat. It's for respectable young women, not for the other kind. It's to keep the respectable ones from becoming the other kind."

Florida smiled. Unluckily, her friend saw a cynicism in her smile of which she herself was not aware. It was just one of

those expressions that convey a sense of sureness, of security, and of ignorance.

"I should think," said Florida lightly, "that a girl who is inclined to be tempted would be tempted in the club; and a girl who doesn't want to be tempted won't be tempted anywhere. Of course, abject poverty is different; but among self-sustaining girls—"

She was assured that she was mistaken. She declined to be convinced, stirred up a discussion amounting almost to a scene, and went home a trifle offended. Next day, however, she sent a check in three figures as her contribution to the club fund, and dismissed the matter from her mind.

Later, she remembered all this; but it was some time after her father fell foul of the rude and predatory persons, and began to haunt the bucket shops.

In the days when Greenbriar's assets had run into millions, Florida had been considered something of a liability. Now, with the millions evaporated, the girl suddenly found herself the old man's only asset.

She became a manicure.

II

FLORIDA SEARS became a manicure because she did not know how to do any other gainful thing. Then there was another reason—the spirit of adventure, the sporting instinct. No one in Florida's set ever did such a thing. Its absurd unconventionality appealed to her.

It was true that Florida was bored with the life she had been living. She had always been termed "an awfully nice girl." Nothing is more monotonous than that. Florida read many books, among which were dozens dealing with the adventures of young women, good and bad, who went up against the world with their bare hands, and who generally ended by taking it by the heels, standing it on its head, and shaking it until the currency fell out of its pockets. They went through experiences which, in real life, would probably have landed them in a home for wayward girls, but they always emerged from their vicissitudes in virginal triumph.

These heroines were invariably poor, and lived in boarding houses where the cost of living was eight dollars and a half per week, leaving them fifty cents a week for spending money. Florida regarded them as purely creatures of the imagination, yet their adventures intrigued her.

There were several things Florida could have done, after her retirement from the profession of heiress. Elderly women with gout and poodles wanted refined companions combining the qualifications of a Swedish *masseuse* and an amanuensis. Wealthy families needed governesses. These and other occupations tempted her not. She desired to be in the whirl of things, to see life boil and babble around her, to play the game and lay her stakes on the board. So, having taken a few lessons in the use of the file and the orange stick, she set out to find a position.

The big house of Greenbriar Sears had been sold in a vain attempt to satisfy his creditors. The cars in the garage went under the hammer, as did the furniture, pictures, and bric-a-brac. Florida and her father found themselves housed in a small apartment on a street among the Forties, west of Broadway. Their assets in cash did not exceed five hundred dollars.

"My dear," said Greenbriar, "don't worry. This is only temporary. They took a fall out of me, but I'll get back at 'em yet. I know the game. They can't keep a good man down, even if he is older than most of 'em!"

"I know you will, dad," assented Florida, with fine confidence.

For a while she really believed her father. If she had thought their poverty a permanent condition, she might not have faced it so blithely. She contemplated life in the immediate future as a hunter looks upon a trip into the jungle—dangerous, perhaps, and arduous, but only a sojourn, from which he will presently return to his comfortable camp fire. So was it with Florida. The adventure accomplished, she would shortly be back in her Fifth Avenue boudoir.

Greenbriar Sears, with squared shoulders and the spring of a spurious youth in his step, started for Wall Street, and his daughter Florida simultaneously embarked on her search for a job. Her father had roared like a lion when the girl told him the sort of work she intended doing, but she knew how to handle him. He was dubious—in fact, humiliated. He said so.

"Well, dad," said Florida, "we have to live. You may be a millionaire again in a month, but what good will it do us if we have starved to death meanwhile?"

"You talk like an Irishman," grumbled Sears; but Florida had her way.

Of course she had saved plenty of good clothes from the wreck. The young woman who walked into the manicure room of the Stratford, and asked for the manager, looked like a million dollars. Mr. Crassmore came forward, all smiles, with his best please-wipe-your-feet-on-me manner.

He saw a stunning girl, gowned modestly in some simple, dark thing costing not a penny more than three hundred dollars, and wearing a snug toque, which Mr. Crassmore would probably have called a bonnet. This little hat rested on Florida's head at a smart angle, and below it the warm tones of her hair shone like spun silk. Her eyes were bright with excitement, and the tenseness of the moment had sent more than the usual glow of color into her round cheeks.

The white-clad girls along the mirrored wall, seated at their tables of white enamel and awaiting the first customers of the day, observed Florida with swift and knowing appraisal. She was the real thing, they were ready to testify.

When Mr. Crassmore, manager of the barber shop and manicure room of the Stratford, learned that his caller was not the owner of the hotel passing through on a tour of inspection, but merely another girl looking for work, his manner changed. From sycophancy he graduated swiftly to condescension; but it was a condescension tempered with a bold admiration.

He questioned her swiftly concerning her qualifications, and smiled obliquely when he learned that Florida was a beginner. Had she been unattractive, that would have closed the interview. As it was, Mr. Crassmore engaged her at a beginner's salary—which, he assured her, would be generously augmented by tips.

"When shall I begin?" asked Florida.

"As soon as convenient," replied Crassmore. "Say to-morrow morning?"

"Very well."

"In the meanwhile, if you would care to drop in at about half past twelve, I should like to explain to you a few things about our rules and methods."

"I could do that."

"Then we might—er—have a bite of lunch—"

"I beg pardon?"

"Just to get acquainted. You will need to learn several things that—"

"No, thank you. I couldn't do that."

Men had invited Florida Sears to lunch many times, and she had accepted gladly;

but she would no more have gone to lunch with Crassmore than she would have sat down at table with a well-trained pig. Somehow, it seemed about the same thing. Crassmore was plump, oleaginous, pink, and perfumed. His linen was spotless and his soul spotty, as Florida could see through the window of his too ardent eye.

The man turned red, observing the contempt of the applicant for employment.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"I—I shouldn't care to," said Florida, with cold honesty. "I'd prefer not to make a business talk a social occasion."

"Is that so? Well, let me tell you that young women who work for me find it quite to their advantage not to draw that distinction too sharp!"

"Good day," said Florida promptly.

She left the manicure room of the Stratford exactly as she had found it, with the girls along the wall exchanging glances which said, in lifted eyebrows:

"O-oh! Wonder what Crass said to the princess? She sure told him where he got off, whatever it was. She wouldn't let him brush her with a whisk broom four feet long!"

III

FLORIDA SEARS, however, did find employment before the morning was gone. The manager of the barber shop and manicure room of the Admiral was not like Crassmore. Cold, incisive, sneering, disillusioned concerning all things feminine, a hard little man with a bald head and an eye of blue ice was Beerman. He engaged Florida after five minutes' questioning, offering her even less than Crassmore had promised to pay.

"Report at one o'clock," he said sharply. "We are very busy. This is a shop where we have a great deal of steady patronage. Our girls are expected to hold their patrons by courtesy, efficiency, and dignity. That does not mean, however, that you are to look as if every man customer was an ogre."

This last remark, Florida supposed, was due to the fact that she had failed to conceal a certain feeling of repulsion for Beerman. It was not that he had made himself obnoxious, like Crassmore, but because she saw in him nothing but a cold, hard, sordid machine. If Crassmore had a spotty soul, Beerman had no soul at all. He was preferable to Crassmore, however, for the rea-

son that he could be regarded quite impersonally.

He inquired if she had the proper habili-ment of white piqué, indicated the position of her station, and dismissed her curtly. Her beauty, if it impressed him at all, was to be regarded as an added asset to the shop. It meant nothing to him personally.

So Florida Sears found herself at work in a whirling center of metropolitan life. The Admiral was a large hotel, comparatively new, and rather splendid. Its accommodations were offered at high prices. Its patrons were liberal spenders, largely from out of town, but in the barber shop and manicure room a considerable proportion of the daily trade was local and fairly permanent.

Florida glanced up and down the rows of tables, and observed that most of the girls were physically attractive. They were, in fact, vividly so. With them the lily was not so proud as to scorn the improving pigment. In idle moments lip sticks and powder puffs and little disks of rouge appeared from vanity boxes, did their half furtive work, and popped out of sight again.

The patrons of the shop were prosperous, well dressed, and sleek. Most of them were noticeably affable, carrying on low-voiced conversation while submitting to the ministrations of Sadie or Maxette or Ingrid. Florida observed that in most cases the steady customers always went to the same girl, and invariably called her by her first name. Frequently the manicurists answered in kind. There was a certain hail-fellow camaraderie here that interested the newcomer.

Florida Sears was a curiously innocent girl. True, she had "gone to places" all her life, had played about with the men of her acquaintance, and had taken her cocktail or julep with the crowd. She had smoked the boys' cigarettes at first, and afterward her own. Nevertheless, how could she, hedged about by conventions, competently judge her fellow beings now that she was "on her own"? To guide her estimates she had only a natural shrewdness and an intuitive guessing equipment, probably no more acutely developed than that of the average girl of breeding.

Therefore, for some days, all this side play in the manicure shop was so much persiflage, which she accepted at its face value. Nevertheless, she did not encourage any such intimacy on the part of her own cus-

tomers. It might be pleasant enough for some girls to chat unreservedly and indiscriminately with Tom, Dick, and Harry; but that it might be a necessary function of the profession she had adopted did not occur to her.

Men came and went during those first few days. Her permanent trade had yet to develop. She was getting the transients.

They sat down and extended their hands for her attention; remarked that it was a nice day or the reverse, according to circumstances; inquired perfunctorily concerning the young lady's health; smoked; sighed; fidgeted; stared at her dimples; said they thought most of the shows in town were pretty punk, and asked her if she didn't think so too.

These were the average grist or "mine run" of Florida's patrons. But there were others.

Within twenty-four hours she had three invitations to lunch, and four to dinner, with theater appendices. One of her customers, fat and alcoholic, went wheezily to sleep. An elderly gentleman from Pontiac, Michigan, told her that he had a niece who looked exactly like her. A man from Abilene, Texas, proposed immediate marriage. A stout *bon vivant* who said he was in the cloak and suit business said she was altogether too beautiful for her job, and offered her a position as model in his showrooms over on Seventh Avenue, where he assured her that life would be one long, summery path of roses with completely amputated thorns. He guaranteed this, assuring her in strict confidence at the same time that his wife had never really understood him, and that he "liked to have nice, refined young ladies around his establishment, as much because they were good company as anything else."

To Florida, all this was like opening an enticing new novel and plunging into it with utter obliviousness to one's surroundings. There are some books you can read in the midst of a storm at sea or an earthquake. Life was that sort of book to Florida.

But she did not read it sympathetically. Her heart did not throb in unison with that of the Grand Rapids furniture salesman who told her that he had brought his wife to New York on his last trip, and that she found fault with everything and ordered all the expensive dishes on the menu card, by golly. After this, he added, she could stay

at home. Did the young lady blame a man like him, that was the soul of generosity in his family life, for having a little fun once in a while?

A maudlin young man from Buffalo informed Florida that his girl at home was the sweetest thing in the world, but awful straightlaced. He showed Florida the puritanical one's picture in the back of his watch. He said that New York was a terrible lonesome town, and he was an utter stranger here, and gee, if he could find some nice girl who would sort of guide him around from high spot to high spot, he was there with the old coin, and don't you forget it, kid! Furthermore, he adored brown eyes.

His loneliness did not awaken an answering chord in the soul of Miss Sears. She worked silently, answered her customers in monosyllables when she answered at all, and thanked them coolly when they left quarters, half dollars, or dollars as gratuities to show their appreciation of her efforts.

If these various patrons had convened in the lobby upstairs for the purpose of appraising the beautiful new manicure girl, some of their remarks would probably have been as follows:

"Swell looker, but cold as ice! Wish I'd worn my ear-laps!"

"Tried my darnedest to break the ice, but nothing doing!"

"Wonder what they want a false alarm like that down there for? I like girls that speak up and show some come-back. Beauty ain't everything."

"Say, she acted as if I was a cave man—scared, see?"

"I bet she'd warm up with a cocktail or two!"

"Yes, but how you going to make her drink 'em? Chloroform her?"

Florida saw the other girls receive the attentions of their men acquaintances cheerfully. She learned that they accepted dinner and theater invitations. One of her fellow workers came in one morning wearing a stunning coat of brown mink. Up and down the line passed the significantly raised eyebrow. Florida had seen enough of the girl's patrons to guess accurately the source of the coat.

Once in a while one or another would be an hour or so late. There would be yawns and sighs.

"Big night, Helen?" This from a chum.

"You said it! Five G. M.! Oh, boy!"

In the soul of Florida Sears dwelt a high contempt for these weaknesses of her sisters, the daughters of Mother Eve. She forgot that she was as human as they.

There are more channels than a hundred to the heart of a maid. When the hundred are blockaded, the hundred and first may remain unsentried. You never can tell.

IV

GREENBRIAR SEARS went daily to the brokers' offices, and usually returned home at night with pockets emptier than they had been in the morning—which was going some. There were days when he picked up twenty-five, fifty, or even a hundred dollars. A gambler sometimes wins, even against the percentage.

Sears had been a plunger all the days of his life, and his luck had held up to the last few months before his downfall. He had been a victim of overconfidence in his own judgment. Advancing years had corroded that judgment, and his luck had loafed on the job.

He was not a big operator in the sense of being able to control hosts of men or build up great properties. He was just a juggler of stocks. Suddenly he found himself on the outside of the market, his profits of twoscore years swept into the pockets of younger, more up-to-date, and craftier speculators. They had gone after his hide and got it—to say nothing of his goat.

Now, with a few dollars in his pocket at the opening, he was able to deal only with the lesser lights of finance among the curb brokers. He could "margin" more shares at ten per cent than at thirty, so he frequented offices where ten-per-cent accounts were accepted from small gamblers. Such places are generally classified as bucket shops, and that is what they usually are. That is to say, they are practically nothing but gambling houses. They take their customers' money, but execute few *bona fide* orders.

When a small stock gambler wins, he invariably puts his principal and his gains back into a new speculation. Ultimately, he is sure to lose. Win or lose, he pays the broker's percentage—and no gambler can beat a percentage, by the infallible law of averages.

If the stock the gambler buys goes up, the broker loses. Cheerfully he pays the loss in cash. He knows that his victim will turn about and buy more stock, which will

go down. The broker will win back what he lost, and more besides.

Greenbriar Sears "margin'd"—that is, he ordered with a payment of cash amounting to ten per cent of the market value of the stock—fifty shares of Prune Development common, at ten dollars a share. Total purchase price, five hundred dollars. Greenbriar's margin, fifty dollars. Theoretically, Greenbriar owed the broker four hundred and fifty dollars.

Suppose the stock advanced one dollar a share. Greenbriar could order the stock sold for five hundred and fifty dollars, and could pocket his profit of fifty dollars. But if it fell a dollar a share, Greenbriar had lost fifty dollars, which was the exact amount he had paid the broker on account. He could pay another fifty dollars—if he had it—and hold the stock. Otherwise, the broker "sold him out," and the old gambler's fifty was gone forever.

That is the simplest explanation of petty stock market gambling that I can give. Of course, the lure of the thing was, that if Greenbriar's fifty shares, which he had margin'd for fifty dollars, started to kite, he made fifty dollars for every dollar per share on the rise. If the stock, by some rare luck, went up to twenty dollars, Sears made five hundred dollars—ten dollars for every dollar he risked. It was on such forlorn chances that he pinned his hopes.

Oddly, he had got his start that way, in his young manhood, when luck had perched on his shoulder and whispered in his ear which stocks to buy. Luck had forgotten to whisper lately, but a jinx in luck's clothing kept giving him counterfeit hunches.

The five hundred dollars that had remained in cash as an anchor to windward was soon gone. Then Greenbriar's expensive watch, scarfpins, a diamond ring—these were fed into the hopper.

Florida possessed some jewelry inherited from her mother, and a little of her own. The collection was worth, perhaps, twenty-five hundred dollars. Her father "borrowed" it, piece by piece. When it was more than half gone, Florida woke up.

She saw that her father was a has-been, a poor old self-deceived gambler, a victim of the poisonous drug of speculation. She had supposed his reverses to be only temporary. Now she knew that he had no chance to come back.

The full comprehension of this came to her with brutal suddenness. She had been

play-acting, as it were. She had been adventuring into a make-believe world, whose reality was cleverly simulated, like the scenery in a theater. Her adventure suddenly became an enterprise of genuine hazard, and the scenery substantial, with rugged knobs on it, and thorny branches that tore the clothes of her complacency.

The animals that lurked behind the trees had seemed all along to be men, dressed like monkeys or lions or wild asses, according to their various choices in the way of costume. She had sat in the Admiral, aloof, observing, polishing nails. It had never struck her that these animals had any harm in their teeth or claws. Now, however, the whole situation was reversed. They weren't men dressed like animals, but animals disguised as men—tigers and pigs, wolves and foxes, monkeys and wild asses, with now and then an honest dog, but not often. This was the reality, not the make-believe.

Florida felt like a hunter who has started out bold and confident, and has lost his way. She was in the jungle, and she must fight her way out or perish.

Life ceased to be a thing of stimulating zest. The novelty of the manicure shop had worn off, and she was sickeningly aware of its sordidness.

At first, some of her acquaintances had dropped in to see her—men with whom she had danced and flirted and played about at summer places. She had received them coolly, without embarrassment. Not having convinced herself that she was really poor, or that her situation was anything more serious than a temporary freak of fortune, which would furnish her with heaps of interesting things to talk about later, she was not humiliated.

She had received with utter indifference Willy Spuyten's proposal, made across the enameled table. Willy was worth five million dollars, but Florida thought him a bore. The stark necessity of matrimony to lift her out of a life of hardship and danger did not occur to her.

In fact, she was rather catty to the men of her acquaintance who sought her out at the Admiral. They dropped away, and she saw them no more. Suddenly she found herself abandoned, among strangers who observed her hungrily and licked their chops.

The money she earned was absolutely essential now. The time was coming, and not far distant, when Florida's earnings would be the only resource of her father and

herself. The outlook was very far from reassuring.

V

To Florida Sears, manicure, now came Ezra Tibbetts, of South Paris, Maine. He sat down timidly in the vacant chair opposite the beautiful Miss Sears, and fixed her with a look of blue appeal.

"How much," he asked, "would you charge to make my hands look real nice?"

Florida told him.

"Gosh!" said Ezra. "Seems a lot, don't it? Well, go ahead. I never had it done before. Always heard a lot about it."

Florida said nothing for five minutes. Ezra was a new one. When she looked at him, he dropped his eyes in confusion. If the others were predatory creatures disguised as human beings, here was a lamb still habited in the garb of his kind.

Florida did something which she had carefully avoided doing ever since she had been working in the Admiral.

"You're a stranger here?" she asked, with demure friendliness.

Ezra looked up, surprised and delighted. He had not supposed that a goddess would condescend to conversation with a South Parisian.

"Yes, ma'am," he said. "I guess you knew it without asking, didn't you?"

"Oh, I just guessed it. In fact, almost all my customers are from out of town."

"Bet they're not all from country places, though! I know I'm a jay; but I won't always be. That's one reason why I come here." He indicated his freshly cut hair. "When I get fixed up, I'm going to buy me a suit. Then I'm going to have a new hat. Then I'm going to get me a job."

Florida Sears's heart went out to Ezra Tibbetts. Not another girl in the place would have viewed him with anything but contempt, and Florida could even now intercept sly smiles of derision as her fellow workers observed her bucolic patron. The humor of the situation appealed to her. She became very animated and comradely.

The other girls stared. They had never seen the icy Miss Sears so affable, even to the most gilded frequenters of the Admiral.

"You're going into business in New York?" she queried.

"Business? If going out and looking for a job's what you call business, I am. I guess I'll find something. I've been through high school and had two years of business

college. Since then I've had seven years of clerking in a store. I can keep a set of books, I can sell a suit of clothes or a disk harrow; and I've bought lots of goods from drummers. I oughtn't to brag, but not one of 'em ever put anything over on little Ezra yet!"

He grinned good-humoredly.

"Ezra?" repeated Florida. "Is that your name? It has a real New England sound."

"The whole thing sounds more so—Ezra Tibbetts, from South Paris, Maine. It isn't quite so flossy as some names, and of course it's like a tag that tells a fellow's pedigree back about six or seven generations. Lots of Tibbettses down our way. Good honest Yankee name, anyhow."

"What sort of business are you thinking of trying—er—Ezra?"

Some imp of mischief had taken control of Florida Sears.

"Anything there's a dollar in. I got about a hundred dollars on hand. After I buy my new suit and things, I won't have much left, so I have to get a job real soon. Where would you advise me to look first?"

Ezra had lost his embarrassment—the goddess was so pleasant, so wholesome, so entirely friendly.

Florida grinned.

"Goodness! I haven't the slightest idea. Perhaps my fath—"

Suddenly she realized that her father could hardly be of any assistance, and stopped. Six months before Greenbriar Sears could have found work for the Maine boy without trouble.

"What about your father? Could he help me?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm sorry. I wish I could advise you; but, you see, I don't know a great deal about the business side of New York myself."

"Oh!" said Ezra dubiously. "I thought you might know somebody that would need a good bookkeeper, or salesman, or something like that."

"There!" announced Florida, giving the young man's hand the small professional tap which marked the end of his sitting. "How do you like them?"

Tibbetts contemplated his hands with admiration; but he looked up with the wistful expression that Florida had first seen in his blue eyes.

"They look good," he said. "If they didn't, I wouldn't care. It's been more than

worth what it cost just to sit and talk to you, Miss—er—"

"Sears."

"Miss Sears—that your name? We've got a town named after some of your family, I guess, down Penobscot way. Ever hear of Searsport?"

Florida nodded.

"I'll be going," said Ezra, with obvious regret. He consulted a robust watch. "Half past twelve. Aren't you hungry? Where do you eat? Go home, or do you bring your dinner, or what? I'm not used to New York ways. We always have three meals off the same table every day. Gets tedious, too. Guess that's one reason why I came to New York."

Florida arose.

"If you'll meet me outside," she said, "I'll take you to a good place for lunch, where it isn't expensive and things are nice."

Horrors! Florida Sears going to lunch with a customer! She could not believe it; yet it was true.

When they finished their half-hour meal, the young man said:

"Say, you want to do me one little favor? I don't know how to pick out a suit of clothes that's the right thing. I'm afraid some fly salesman will wish something on me that'll make me look a worse hayseed than I do now. Come and help me pick it out!"

Florida told him that she had to get back to work. She added that she thought him fully competent to make his own selection, but she advised him not to get anything too striking.

"Oh, bother!" said Ezra. "Say, I'll wait till to-morrow noon. Could you go then—if we hurried our dinner a little?"

Florida smiled and dimpled and refused weakly and—went.

VI

So it was that while her companions were pleased with the attentions of men with large hearts and stout bank rolls, Florida Sears found a curious satisfaction in the friendship of a country boy without money or social pretensions. Here are some of the reasons:

Ezra Tibbetts did not call her "kid."

He wore quiet clothes and spoke frankly of his mother, back in South Paris.

He did not know a cabaret from a taboret, being utterly unacquainted with both.

He did not offer her tips on the races.

He did not bring her expensive boxes of candy which she would have had to decline.

He did not try to squeeze her hand.

He did not drop princely gratuities—or any other kind—with an air of overpowering munificence. In regard to this a conversation occurred.

"Miss Sears," said Ezra, "I suppose you think I'm funny not to give you money. Well, I can't afford to. I've got a job that pays me twenty-one dollars a week, and I send my folks part of that. It's an extravagance for me to come here at all, but I like you, and you're good to me and cheer me up when I'm lonesome. Do you know that I've been awful homesick since I came here? Maine folks are a homesick people. Besides, I just felt as if your friendship was something I didn't have because I bought and paid for it. I couldn't bring myself to—to give you a quarter or a half dollar. It would embarrass me to death, and sort of spoil things."

"Ezra," said Florida, "you are the one bright spot in my life just now. If you tried to tip me, I should burst into tears. It would be like losing a good friend. I'm glad you feel as you do. I—I'm rather miserable, and you really help me a lot. You don't understand, but it is so."

"Gosh!" said Ezra.

That was all that he could get from Florida on the subject.

It was true—Ezra was a spot of sunshine in the girl's life, because of all the men who came into the shop he was the only one she felt she could absolutely trust. He was like a breath of fresh wind across a newly cut field, like a clean wisp of night fog over a low-lying meadow, like a glint of that marvelous down-east sunshine which she had never seen except in Maine. He was as honest as a clock, and almost as regular.

He came in each Wednesday and reported on his doings during the last week. He was working in the uptown office of one of the big Wall Street brokerage houses, having run upon the job through an advertisement. Florida made up her mind that he had impressed his prospective employers, just as he had impressed her, by his wholly ingenuous approach and his air of open-eyed frankness.

It was a wholesome friendship, and one that Florida prized. A year ago a man like Ezra would have meant nothing to her.

Now he served to show her the difference between oversophistication and unspoiled manliness.

About this time something unexpected happened. Florida Sears was discharged.

VII

MAX CARTIER was a steady patron of the manicure room at the Admiral, where he bestowed the favor of his custom upon a girl named Anita Musgrove, a pleasingly composed blonde. Take it from Anita, Max was very loose with his coin when he played the host, and more than appreciative of feminine charm.

However, Anita got married, rather suddenly, and not to Max. The *bon vivant*, who was plump and well groomed, did not seem at all disconcerted at losing his playmate. As he was reputed to be worth millions, it was thought entirely possible that he had made matrimony an easy road for the fair Anita, in order to be able, unhampered, to turn a roving eye elsewhere. That eye had alighted upon no less a person than the daughter of Greenbriar Sears.

Max Cartier was good-looking, genial, and a clever talker. He was full of the small gossip of Broadway, knew everybody and everything, and was called by name by half the head waiters in New York.

"Good evening," he said, one afternoon at about five o'clock. "Our little friend Anita's gone."

He dropped into the chair at Florida's table.

Florida evidenced not the slightest interest, beyond preparing the implements of her calling and indicating her readiness to begin.

"I've been admiring you," went on Cartier. "You're a very unusual type. I should say my friend Valentine would like to paint your portrait."

Valentine was at that time the most fashionable portrait artist in New York. As it happened, he had done a picture of Florida for her father not twelve months before. This fact, if disclosed, would immediately have opened a happy channel to friendly interchange; but Florida raised one eyebrow disdainfully and continued her work.

"I know Valentine intimately," Cartier went on. "Nice chap—awfully fond of pretty girls. So'm I—especially when they have brown eyes."

No reply. Max considered. Then he tried a new line of attack, with no better

success. He was stumped, and he was not used to that sort of thing.

"See here!" he said abruptly. "What's the matter? Am I so offensive, my dear, that you haven't a civil word for me? I wasn't aware that I possessed so repellent a personality."

"I beg your pardon," rejoined Florida. "I really don't care much for the social side of this business. I prefer to choose my own friends."

It was certainly not a diplomatic speech. Max Cartier had more than a little justice on his side, for Florida's manner was needlessly rude. It was because she knew, or thought she knew, the kind of man Max was.

"I'm squelched," said he, and subsided into moody silence.

Later, he sought out Beerman.

"Fred," he said, "I'm off you."

"What do you mean, off me?"

"I'll tell you. Anita's gone, and the only other girl here I'd give two snaps of my finger for is a human iceberg. I've been coming here pretty steady for a number of years. I'm not an ogre, you know, and I see no reason why I should be treated like one; so, Fred, old man, I'm going to try the Stratford for a while."

Without further discussion, Max took himself off. Beerman called Florida.

"I've been watching you ever since you worked here," he said. "Now I'm through. When you came, I instructed you how to conduct yourself. You've noticed the other girls building up a steady business, but you don't make permanent customers out of your transients. Now one of my old patrons has left because you were insolent. I'm afraid I shall have to put some one in your place who understands the need of treating our trade a little differently."

That was all.

Florida went home and thought the matter over carefully. She could see no flaw in her method; yet in the back of her brain she knew well enough why she had failed. She might, after all, be too uncompromising. She was always seeing, beneath the smug and fashionable habiliments of their disguise, the lions and tigers and wolves and foxes that inhabited the jungle of her adventure. She shivered.

Only that morning she had surrendered to Greenbriar Sears the last of her jewels and ten dollars of the money she ran such risks to earn. She could look ahead and

anticipate some difficulty in paying the rent unless she obtained another place immediately, and unless her father kept away from the stock market.

He did nothing of the kind, and the new job was a long time in coming.

VIII

IF Florida Sears had imagined poverty to be something in the nature of a lark, she now had an opportunity to find out her mistake. She possessed just seventeen dollars in money and some rather expensive clothes, which she had little opportunity to wear, with the exception of a street suit or two.

Florida did not tell her father that she had lost her position. Each morning she rose early and made the coffee and toast and scrambled the eggs on the little gas stove in her kitchenette. In a flurry of panic, however, she refused to let Greenbriar have more than a dollar on the day following her dismissal.

"Dad, dear," she said, "aren't we going to get anything back from all the money we've been investing?"

"Why, of course we are, my dear—of course. I expect to make a very good turn to-day—very good indeed; but I really ought to have ten dollars."

"But I gave you ten yesterday, and—"

"Yes, yes, Florry, yes, yes! That money is tied up now—not lost, you understand, but advanced as a deposit on a purchase of a very promising stock at my broker's. A favorable movement in the market will net me a handsome profit. That's why I want the other ten. Ahem! You see, I could double my purchase and make that much more money. Oh, really, my dear, it's quite necessary!"

"I'm sorry as I can be, dad, but I haven't it. I had to spend some money on myself this week. I suppose I shouldn't have, but—"

"There, there, it's all right. I shall do very well, my dear, if you will just let me have half a dollar for my car fares and a bite of lunch."

The old man toddled off, and Florida presently started on her quest for work. She scarcely doubted that she would find it before noon. She made the rounds of the hotels of the better class, but obtained no encouragement. Late in the afternoon she returned to the apartment, feeling unusually tired. She thought that this was

due to the unaccustomed amount of walking she had done, but presently she was aware that she had taken an exceedingly heavy cold.

Next morning, feeling utterly miserable, she resumed her search. By night she was wretchedly ill.

Still dreading to tell her father the truth, she faced the third day with grim determination; but when old Greenbriar had gone down town, with the half dollar which was now his daily tax upon her dwindling resources, she turned and sank into a chair. It was no use. She made herself as comfortable as she could, slept a good deal, and was feeling a little better by night. Greenbriar, returning to find her busied in the preparation of dinner, had no suspicion of the truth.

After a night's rest, she rose, and was astonished to realize how weak she was. Her mirror showed her a face lacking its usual vividness of color.

"Goodness, I look a fright!" she thought.

Making ready for the street, she was chagrined to observe how worn her expensive brown street suit had grown. She laid it aside, and tried another; but that dress was black, and only enhanced her pallor.

"On the stage," she mused grimly, "I've seen the poor working girl look exactly this way. Wonder why I don't try to get into the movies! I could do a pathetic part without a make-up."

The fresh air of the streets brought a little courage. She set out briskly, heading eastward across town, her destination the big hotels that cluster about the junction of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Ninth Street. At Broadway she met Max Cartier.

Florida would have passed the man without a nod, but he stood in her path, hat in hand, evidently bent on detaining her.

"Just a minute," he said, with decision. "This is a fortunate meeting."

"If you please," returned Florida coldly, "I'd rather not stop."

"Oh, but you must, you know! What I have to say is important. In the first place, I owe you an apology."

"No apology is necessary, Mr. Cartier, I assure you. I'd much prefer not to talk to you."

"You must! It was my fault that you were dismissed by Beerman. I was a cad, Miss Sears, and I acknowledge it. Now I'm anxious to make amends."

"It's all right," said Florida dully. "I

dare say I was uncivil to you and to other customers at the Admiral; but—"

There was something rather engaging in Cartier's attitude. He wasn't bad-looking, and his eyes were full of friendliness. The man was determined to be kind, in spite of her opposition.

"I went back to see Beerman the day after you left. I had no idea that he would let you go. When I found out how he had treated you, I was heartbroken."

Florida made a hopeless little gesture, as if dismissing the whole subject, and started to move on; but Max was obdurate.

"Now listen, Miss Sears, won't you? I'm not half so bad as you think. I want you to forgive me for the things I said to you the other afternoon. You had a right to resent them, because, while they were the kind of things I might have said to the other girls, you're not like the others. I lost my temper, too, which was uncouth and caddish. Now, can I humble myself any more?"

Florida softened the merest trifle. What could one do? The man was plainly sincere in his contrition.

"Please, Mr. Cartier, don't say any more. It's perfectly all right. Girls who work in public places ought to adjust themselves to conditions. It was absurd, of course, to behave as I did. I was more the offender than you."

"If I might walk along with you," ventured Cartier, "I'd like just a few words more."

He fell into step at her side, showing a nice deference.

"You see," he went on, "when I found out that you had left, I blamed myself. I got Beerman to give me your address; but I thought I'd best not bother you, because you'd be angry if I did. Still, I was anxious about you, and I made quiet inquiries about your success in getting another place. Then I learned that you were ill, and that made me feel still more miserable about you."

"It was quite unnecessary."

"Well, perhaps; but I have a good many friends, you know. I dare say Beerman would be glad to take you back. In fact, he says he will."

Florida shook her head.

"I wouldn't go back there for anything in the world!"

"Very likely. Can't say I blame you. Perhaps I can help you to get in somewhere

else. I could write you a note to Jamieson, of the Claverley Arms. It's a very good place, and Jamieson's under obligations to me. In fact, I have a stock interest in the hotel. You'll let me do that much, won't you?"

"No," said Florida, "I can't. You may think me rude and ungracious, but I must be honest. It would kill me to accept anything from you. You probably don't understand why it is so, but I really can't. I'm grateful, too, in a way—truly grateful. I feel sure that you are moved by a very kindly impulse; but I just mustn't let you help me."

"I'm so distressed," said Cartier. "I can't tell you how distressed I am. This is one of the worst situations I ever got myself into. Miss Sears, I'm not the boulder you think me. Any of my friends will tell you I'm rather a decent sort. I've never willingly made any one unhappy in my life; and if I've done so unintentionally, I've always been sorry and tried to make the thing right. But what can I do, when you won't let me?"

"Nothing," said Florida, and smiled.

The smile was just faintly tinged with amiability—yes, with friendliness. She was too warm-hearted, too generous, to retain the full force of the resentment she had felt toward Cartier.

"Well," said the man, slowing up, "we'll see. I die hard. Perhaps I shall be able to help you in some way yet!"

He raised his hat and bowed. Florida nodded far less curtly than she knew she ought, and went on her way. She had fought a skirmish—and of course she had won—well, hadn't she? Perhaps, after all, one couldn't be quite sure.

IX

IF you know anything about New York, you may be aware that one cannot expect to catch it casually by the tail and make it do tricks. Strangers come to the metropolis, confident that it will lie down and roll over, jump through a hoop, and play dead for them. In most cases they justify this attitude by their previous success in other cities. To them it seems, in some instances, as if the great city came and arched its back and rubbed against their legs and purred.

"Pretty pussy! Nice kitty! Where can I get my hands on a million easy dollars? That diamond collar of yours is lovely—

gee whiz! The confounded thing scratched me. Help, help—the doctor!"

Big, lovable, suave, cajoling, insincere, fascinating, beautiful, generous, capricious New York! A faithful wife, a dangerous mistress—look out, there, she's got your pocketbook!

Florida Sears, who had lived in New York most of her life, was still a stranger to many of its phases. To her, now, was turned the cruel, the heartless side. She had never supposed the town could be so cold and hard. It was impervious, pitiless, indifferent, moving on its swift way like a sphinx on wheels, holding the answer to a riddle behind a sneer.

"How shall my father and I live?" was the riddle.

This girl who but a few months before had been lapped in luxury, who had never given a second thought to the source of her bounty, now found herself actually hungry.

She took some of her fine gowns and pawned them. They yielded pitifully little. Rent day was coming fast. Greenbriar Sears journeyed no more to Wall Street, because Florida could not provide him with car fare or lunch money. She went around on Eighth Avenue and bought eggs, two at a time, bacon by the quarter pound, small loaves of bread.

The old speculator sat at home and read the stock market reports. He understood now why his daughter could not provide him with money to margin even the smallest purchase of stocks. So he sat and schemed and racked his brain for expedients.

"I'll go hunt up Latham," he would say. "He and I shared many a profitable deal together. He'd stake me a couple of thousand, I'm sure."

"No, father, don't borrow money. Think of it—you've lost every penny that you've put into the game since—since we moved over here. Luck is against you."

"But I know how I can double a hundred dollars—yes, triple it—"

"If you borrow a penny," said Florida, "and I hear of it, I'll leave you!"

There was something so determined in his daughter's tone that Greenbriar sighed and gave up the idea. Besides, he had a touch of rheumatism, and the apartment was warm and comfortable. Perhaps in a few days he'd be feeling like himself. Then he'd do something about raising a little money. He had a plausible plan for making a million dollars—something like cor-

nering all the apple trees and boosting the price of vinegar. He wore out a dozen pencils and used up acres of such paper as he could get hold of, figuring his profits.

It seemed to Florida that her father was showing signs of a weakened mind. To say the least, his senility could not be doubted. He protested violently at the situation in which he and his daughter found themselves, condemned himself unmercifully for having brought it about, stormed against her seeking work at a "humiliating occupation," and always fell back on the project of borrowing a few hundred dollars from some old friend.

Florida doubted if any one would lend him money. Why should one lend to a hopeless insolvent, with not the slightest prospect that the debt would ever be paid? If such a loan could be had, the lender would feel that it was nothing less than a gift. Charity! Florida shuddered.

However, she did finally get a job. It was at one of the unimportant hotels, a third-rate but respectable establishment, where one manicure girl was retained as an attaché of the barber shop. The pay was small, the tips meager. Still, there was a poor living in it for her father and herself.

Florida was not so plump as she had been, because worry and too little food had—oh, did I ever say that Florida was plump? Not really plump—just gracefully curvilinear and pleasing. Now she was just as pleasing, if not quite so curvilinear. Her brown eyes looked bigger, and had in them a wistful light that was marvelously appealing.

Ezra Tibbetts chanced to espy her in the barber shop of the Hotel Fedora. Pop-eyed, he stood before her table and gazed.

"It's you!" he said. "Good Heavens! Where have you been?"

He dropped into the chair and devoured her with his blue and honest gaze. From brow to toe he appraised her.

"Something's happened to you," he said. "You've been sick or something. You disappeared from the Admiral all of a sudden. Say, do you know I've been 'most heart-broken about it?"

"Why, Ezra!"

"Well, I have. Why didn't you let a fellow know? Do you think I want to lose my friends that way—like having the earth swallow 'em? I haven't any to spare, and I can't afford to lose any. Where have you been?"

"Why—er—working, and taking care of my father, who isn't very strong."

"Too bad! But tell me, did you leave the Admiral of your own accord, or were you fired?"

Ezra accompanied this extremely leading question with a look of shrewd assurance.

"As you so elegantly express it, I was fired."

"Why?"

"Because I resented something one of the customers said to me."

"Who was it? I'll knock his block off! You haven't been here long. I know, because I come here all the time. I get my lunches here. It's good and cheap. Say, it's lunch time now. Come on!"

Florida might have resented being ordered to mobilize by a young upstart from the tall grass. Instead, she rose and reached for her hat.

"You don't need any hat," said Ezra. "We'll just go in the ladies' dining room. I only have three-quarters of an hour for lunch, anyhow."

Florida Sears found herself actually enjoying the company of the honest Ezra. The young man was irritated because she had not let him know where she had been, and said so.

"Don't you care anything about me?" he pointedly inquired. "I've been worried almost to death!"

Florida said that she couldn't believe it had really made any difference to him. Whereupon he demanded bluntly if it hadn't made a difference to her.

Impulsively, Florida confessed that she had been too miserable to care much about anything. She'd been through a good deal—

Abruptly, she broke off. It wasn't thoroughbred to air one's troubles.

"It's worse than you admit, then," said Ezra, helping her to a bit of steak.

If the girl had told him the whole truth, he would have been informed that such a thing as steak was an almost forgotten article of diet in her young life.

"By golly," said Ezra, "I like to see you eat! That's nice tender steak, too. The food's good here, and not too expensive. Miss Sears, want me to tell you something? Well, when I saw you, I was so glad I had a lump in my throat. I wanted to cry. Wasn't that foolish? Oh, boy! You look good to me; but you aren't as fat as you were—"

"Ezra Tibbetts! I never was fat in my life!"

"Well, no, ma'am, that's right—you weren't fat. I mean you're thinner. Did you say your father was ill?"

"Oh, no, but he's beginning to get old."

"Doesn't he work?"

"He hasn't lately."

"Have you been working at all since you left the Admiral? I mean, have you had a place?"

"I've been busy."

"I didn't ask if you'd been busy. You've been out of a job, to be blunt—now haven't you?"

Florida nodded a confession.

"Huh!" said Ezra. He eyed the empty dish where a good-sized porterhouse steak had rested. He knew how much *he* had eaten of that steak. "If I thought, after all you've done for me, that you wouldn't let me know when there was any way I could help you, I'd cut you right off my calling list. Yes, I would, Miss Sears!"

"Nonsense!"

"Nonsense nothing! Listen. I've got a job. They like me over there, and I've learned a lot about the game. I'm making regular money, too. Let's you and me get married."

"Ezra!"

"Well, Ezra me all you want to. I like you. Fact is, I'm crazy about you."

"You know nothing about me."

"Then it's time I learned, and the best way to learn is to get you to marry me. Now, another thing."

"Don't you think you've given me a good deal to think about already?"

"You do too much thinking—too much worrying, I mean. Will you answer me one question?"

"Do I have to?"

Ezra nodded, while his lips puckered in the odd way that some Yankees have when their mind is very intent.

"Well, I'll try."

"I want to know, then, if you're in actual want. Maybe not, but I have a hunch. Hunches sometimes go for a whole lot in our business. Are you up against it this minute?"

Florida's first impulse was to imitate a laugh, light and bantering, and say:

"How silly! Of course not!"

But she felt the young man's blue, shrewd gaze almost like a physical thing. She tried to tear her eyes away, so that she

could equivocate, evade, and qualify. The eyes of Yankee blue compelled her.

"Yes," she admitted, in spite of herself. "A little. That is, for the next week or two father and I will have to be a little careful—"

"And starve yourselves? You were a pretty hungry girl when you came into this restaurant. Honey, I'm going to help you."

"No, no—you're not, you're not! I'm all right. We don't need help."

"Rent paid?"

Florida nodded.

"Florida Sears, that's not the truth. Suppose your rent isn't paid on the 1st? How much time do they give you before you have to get out?"

"Oh, the landlord's not that sort. He's been very decent—"

"So you haven't paid for last month! Then, if you don't come across right away, you'll owe him for two months. He won't stand that. You pay up. Here!"

"Ezra, don't, don't! I couldn't! It's impossible!"

"See here, Florida, you listen. I've known you for years and years—or weeks and weeks. Doesn't make any difference. You're my friend. You're in a lot of trouble, and apparently the shoe pinches pretty tight. I want you to let me help you. I know nice young ladies aren't supposed to let men pay their rent. Never mind that—it's foolish. Circumstances alter cases. If you want to do the cruelest, wickedest, most unfriendly thing you can think of, you just refuse to let me help you. If you want to make me feel absolutely rotten, turn me down. Anyhow, you're going to marry me—"

"But I'm not!"

"All right—leave that until later. Just now we'll have the landlord taken care of. Here's sixty dollars—there, slip it out of sight. Here comes the waiter. George, how much is our check?"

X

If you had asked Florida Sears to explain what happened at that memorable luncheon, she would have been unable to do so. Her conventional code knew no rule that did not flatly forbid her acceptance of a loan from Ezra Tibbetts. Of course, the reason for her weakness was—Ezra Tibbetts. He was a masterful young man. She learned that he had done well at his job with the brokerage house.

Ezra had a nice way—there was no denying it. From New England hills and farms he brought a personality uncorroded by the city's artificialities. He was honest and clear-headed. He was shrewd. He saw through the thin veneer of metropolitan affectation, the assumptions and presumptions, the false standards, the hypocrisy, the four-flushing of those who lacked the self-reliance to be themselves.

People were always living by rules that other people had made, because they did not dare break them, or breaking those rules in order to feel the zest of lawlessness. They did not examine the rule to determine whether it was inherently right, and so worth keeping, or based on some social fiction, and so to be ignored.

There is no moral wrong in a girl's conduct when she borrows money from a man; but to the suspicious mind there is an implication of deep impropriety. According to the superficial code of society, for a girl to borrow money and pay it is worse than for a man to borrow and default.

Ezra Tibbetts did not take any stock in such nonsense. Because he was masterful, he had his own way; and Florida Sears paid him back—a little at a time, through many weeks of grinding economy. She had not allowed Ezra to know the real extent of her need, and the loan came like manna from heaven—a veritable life-saver.

With the rent paid, and a few odd dollars in her pocketbook, Florida's courage came back. She was young, buoyant, and not without optimism. She had learned a lesson.

To the Hotel Fedora came scores of business men for luncheon. Occasionally one of these demanded tonsorial attention, and that gave him a chance to see Florida. The news of her spread from lip to lip, and business in the Fedora barber shop took a boom. Men discovered the need of more frequent haircuts. The pen may be mightier than the sword, but the penknife runs a bad second to the orangewood stick, and Florida had all she could do.

But, because adversity teaches wisdom, she modified the loftiness of her demeanor. She smiled. She exchanged harmless commonplaces with her customers. In the suburbs the scarcity of domestic help may outrun the weather as a topic of earnest consideration, but in a manicure shop the latter wins by a large plurality. A good-looking operator and an affable patron can

make weather analysis a *pièce de résistance* almost as satisfying as a Sunday roast of beef. Serve it sizzling out of the oven with the bowl of soapsuds, sliced cold with the filing course, fricasseed with the peroxide—there's still enough left for a plate of hash as the buffer completes the job.

Florida Sears could take a cheap cut of weather—say a tough, stringy day in late November—and sauce and garnish it so that it tasted as good as the imitation *filet mignon* at a dollar *table d'hôte*.

But she made one rule, which marked her as unique among girls in her calling—she refused all gratuities. The proceeds of her labors went into her employer's till, and she drew a salary each week. It was not a large salary, but it took care of Florida and her father, although it did not provide any surplus for the old man's petty market operations.

Consequently he became crabbed, surly, resentful. In spite of his daughter's warning, he went to see some of his former friends and borrowed one or two small sums of money, which he promptly lost. Meanwhile he was getting seedy in appearance. He possessed a decent pride which kept him out of the class of shameless mendicants into which so many stock dabblers inevitably drift. Florida managed to buy him some presentable garments, and he was properly grateful, but she would give him nothing for margin trading.

Then, by accident, she discovered his indebtedness, gaining a clew from some chance memorandum left in the pocket of a coat that she was mending. She was clever enough to extract the truth by fifteen minutes of questioning.

"So," she said, "that's six hundred dollars we owe!"

"But, Florry, you don't owe it. It's no affair of yours. I'll pay it back very shortly."

"From what?"

"Why, from my stock market operations. I know of a stock that would show me a tremendous profit inside of a week, if I only had twenty or thirty dollars. Now, Florry, couldn't you manage?"

"Please, dear, dear daddy, don't ask me for what I haven't got. We must pay back Mr. Gatling and Mr. Staples. Oh, what made you do it? It's so humiliating!"

"Not at all, not at all humiliating. A business loan between friends, that's all. They know I'm perfectly good for it."

"But I don't. Please don't go down to Wall Street again! It tires you so. Stay around the house and take it easy. Why don't you go and call on some of your cronies?—only don't borrow their money. There's Mr. Apthorpe. He's retired. He would probably enjoy talking over old times with you."

"He might, but I'm not going, just the same. I stayed in business long after Apthorpe quit, and I'd be in business yet if I had a little ready capital. I'm no has-been, like Apthorpe. Besides, he advised me to retire when he did, and I told him he was a fool to stop just in the prime of life. Now, if I go to see him, he'll be sure to twit me. I won't stand for his confounded I-told-you-so's!"

Irritated and disappointed, Greenbriar was becoming harder and harder to get along with. He moped a good deal. Florida worried about the debts he had contracted, seeing no way to repay them. Life wasn't much fun, she thought. The adventure of poverty had become a grim and grinding slavery, far removed from the realm of sport.

Recognizing the reason for his increased patronage, Florida's employer gave her a raise of three dollars a week. Faithfully she deposited this in a savings bank, hoping in that way to be able, in time, to pay her father's debts to Gatling and Staples. If she would have accepted tips, she might have prospered exceedingly; but she told herself that tips had to be paid for in too dear a coinage.

She treated every patron alike, playing no favorites. Not much of the gilded type of trade drifted into the Fedora. When a man offers a girl a gratuity of a dollar, and she pleasantly refuses it, he makes up his mind that there must be something wrong with her. She ceases to interest him, no matter how pretty she is, when he finds out that she is absolutely independent. Courteous, friendly, sweet, she will be. She will meet banter with banter, and show very plainly what boundary line must not be crossed, should her patron presume too far. The gilded type of patrons do not like boundary lines across which fat tips will not purchase a passage.

Largely, therefore, Florida's customers were of the substantial, thrifty type. They were glad enough not to be expected to tip. They came and went and came again. They were, in a way, Florida's friends, respecting

her as she respected herself. They did not expect anything they did not pay for, or seek to pay for favors they well knew it was not her intention to bestow.

Ezra Tibbetts came with the same regularity that had been his habit when Florida was employed at the Admiral. Florida looked forward to seeing him each week, because she liked him, and for another reason. She always paid him something on account of the loan, and Ezra systematically scribbled a receipt.

Sometimes she went to lunch with the man from Maine; and on such occasions she insisted on paying for her own food. This caused a loud roar of protest from her escort, but Florida insisted.

"I give you two or three dollars to apply on my loan," she said; "and why should I allow you to turn around and spend a good part of it on me? Unless I may pay for my lunch, I can't come with you, Ezra."

"All right," assented Ezra grumpily. "Make it Dutch, if you want to. I suppose if I asked you to go to the theater, you'd try to pay for your own ticket!"

"No," said Florida. "That would be different."

Ezra went back to work with a puzzled look in his eyes.

"Gosh!" he mused. "Don't women beat the dickens?"

XI

"WELL," said Max Cartier, "how are things going with you?"

He had come into the room and dropped into the chair opposite Florida Sears so suddenly that she was startled.

"Why—er—thank you, things go very nicely."

"That's good! I've been keeping away from you, because I didn't want you to be able to say that I persecuted you; but I really wanted to see you, so I ran the risk of your displeasure. I promise to behave in an entirely civilized manner."

Florida proceeded with her work. Cartier had nice hands, well shaped, well cared for, gentleman's hands.

"It's been a lovely day," said Miss Sears, adhering to her fixed policy of treating all her patrons alike. She looked across at Cartier, whose eyes were twinkling with good humor. Undoubtedly he was fine-looking. He didn't intend to let any one know how close he was to fifty years old,

Florida would have guessed him to be forty-five, at most.

"How's your father?" he asked.

"My father? What do you know—"

"About your father? Quite a bit. He's Mr. Greenbriar Sears, isn't he? Rather a well-known figure down town at one time. Clever operator, they say. Too bad men have to grow old, isn't it?"

Florida made some banal reply, like "They all do it, I suppose." She did not exactly relish so personal a note in the conversation.

"I try not to grow old," went on Cartier. "I take care of myself. How old should you guess me to be?"

"I'd rather not guess, Mr. Cartier."

"Forty?"

"Well, forty-two, perhaps."

Max Cartier smiled, flattered and pleased.

"Missed it by three years," he assured her; whereupon she knew, somehow, that she had missed it by six or seven.

"I'm interested in the stock market myself," said her patron. "Is your father doing anything of that sort these days?"

Florida shook her head. A little qualm possessed her. She thought of the money owed to Gatling and Staples.

"If he were," said Cartier, "I think I might be in the way of giving him a little information from time to time."

"Thank you," returned Florida; "but he hasn't done any trading for some time. He's virtually retired."

"Tough game!" said Max. "Not much friendship in it, I tell you. One has to look alive; but if you're in right, you can make money. I don't mind saying I'm in right, Miss Sears."

"That's fine," said Florida, in a level voice.

The colloquy proceeded along harmless lines, Cartier more than once referring to opportunities for certain profits in Wall Street, if one had the right information.

"Thank you for a pleasant hour," he said, rising to go. "You've been more than agreeable, and I appreciate it. I don't forget obligations, Miss Sears, and you know I'm still dreadfully in your debt. I haven't given up hoping that I shall be allowed to square accounts some day."

"You owe me nothing, Mr. Cartier."

"May I come again?"

"This is a business institution."

"In other words, you can't help yourself, or pick and choose your patrons. Well,

that's a comfort; for I shall drop in now and again. I promise not to obtrude myself socially."

Florida expected a tip, and wondered what he would do when she refused it; but he offered her nothing. He took his check, paid the barber, bowed, waved his hand gayly, and was gone.

After all, a likable enough person!

You must bear in mind that Florida Sears had always been used to wonderful things which only large quantities of money could buy. The novelty of battling for her livelihood had long since worn away. Life was just one weary episode after another, a monotonous grind of work.

Ezra Tibbetts was the weekly oasis in her desert. He was always full of new things to talk about. He studied New York and made shrewd comments upon the city, poking fun at its foibles, awed at its immensity, but withal completely won by its vitality and fascination.

"Folks do things here," he said. "They pick up their feet and move forward. They have to, or some one treads on their heels. I never get over feeling like a rube."

"You don't look like one."

"No—I can't afford to. What do you think? I'm handling customers now. I'm building up a line of trade. I've studied nights and Sundays, so as to be able to talk the language. It's an exciting life. My boss says I've got kind of a knack for the business. I can reel off the dope on stocks like an old-timer."

"Why, Ezra, you're boasting!"

"Excuse me, honey—I didn't mean to; only it's nice to feel as if you fit your job. I want people to like me. It's a big asset. We have chaps in our office who have been there a long time and haven't got ahead. Why? Because they don't make people like 'em. If people like you, they give you their business."

"I know."

"Yes—your trouble's just the opposite. They like you too much. That is, they would if you'd let 'em. If they all felt as I do, they'd love you!"

"Ezra, don't be silly!"

"I'm not silly. Tell me, Florry, when do we get married? When are you going to be my sweet old Florida orange, so that I can squeeze you?"

"Mr. Tibbetts! I don't permit gentlemen to speak to me like that. If it was any one else, I should be deeply offended."

"That's some comfort. You make 'em all keep off the grass."

"Tell me, Ezra, do you know anything about a man named Max Cartier in the stock market?"

"Why, sure! He's some pumpkins down town. He's made a lot of money, and lately, I hear, he's made it fast. He's one of the sure-thing boys, too. No speculating for that chap! He knows exactly what's coming off long before it happens. Because why? Because he and his crowd make it happen."

"I don't understand."

"You wouldn't, unless I took a day off and explained it. There are cliques that manipulate stocks. They have loads of money, and know all the tricks. They see some stock they want to buy, so they go out and force the price down by selling—"

"But I thought you said they wanted to buy it?"

Ezra made a gesture of despair.

"There, don't you see? It sounds silly, doesn't it? That's why it's hard to tell you about. There's too much technical explanation necessary. Anyhow, these chaps will bear the market—which means forcing the price of a stock down. When it's low enough to suit 'em, they'll buy it. Then they'll start to bull the stock, and up she goes again. They clean up, and the fellows on the other end stand the gaff."

"What?"

"Lose—pay the freight—go broke. It's a cutthroat game, I tell you."

"And Mr. Cartier makes his money that way?"

"He's in a pretty powerful crowd."

"And real value has nothing to do with the prices of the stocks?"

"Ordinarily, everything; but when those fellows start playing with a stock, value hasn't much to do with it."

"What is your connection with such things?"

"None. We're brokers. We buy and sell on commission. Our customers tell us what to buy, and we buy it and deliver it to them. They tell us what to sell, and we sell it. Besides, our business is in standard stocks and bonds, not in the specialties and speculative things that Cartier plays with."

"Ezra, what is a margin?"

The young man's jaw dropped.

"Florry, what am I? A financial catechism? Who's been putting you up to asking all these questions? What do you know

about Max Cartier? Where did you ever hear of a margin?"

"If you don't want to tell me, of course I don't insist."

"Come to dinner with me to-night, and I'll tell you everything I know. You've got my curiosity up. Honey, you don't know Cartier, do you? Why, I've heard he's one of the biggest sports on Broadway."

"I've met him in a business way, that's all," replied Florida.

"Huh!" rejoined Ezra. "I'm not stuck on your business. Now let's fix it. Are we going to the theater to-night? Then I can be your little handy guide to Wall Street, pocket size, bound in half calf, with your name stamped on the cover. Is it a go?"

"All right, handy guide—I'll go," said Florida cheerfully.

But she didn't. When she reached home, she found her father lying unconscious on the floor of the small living room.

Downstairs in the hall, she cried excitedly into the telephone the number of Ezra's boarding place, and told him that the theater engagement was off. She had already called the doctor, who arrived in half an hour and announced that Greenbriar Sears had suffered a stroke, not necessarily fatal, but sure to render him helpless for a long time to come.

Florida sat up all night ministering to the sick man. Next morning a nurse was installed before Florida left for her work. The nurse's wages were equal to Florida's. Query—what would she use to pay the grocer, the landlord, and other crass persons who demanded value received for the necessities of life?

XII

THERE followed for Florida Sears the cruelest weeks in her experience. It seemed as if circumstances had combined pitilessly to crush her, and she fought with her back to the wall.

Day after day she worked at the Fedora; night after night her rest was broken by her father's need of attention. After a fortnight the trained nurse was dispensed with and paid off. Of the savings set aside to discharge her father's obligations to Gatling and Staples there was almost nothing left. The doctor's bill could wait, but the attendant who came in by the day worked on a weekly cash basis.

Bigger and more menacing loomed the specter of real poverty. How could Florida

Sears apply for her father's admission as a non-paying patient at a public hospital? Yet how could she pay the rent and meet other demands?

Her mirror informed her that the strain was telling on her. Since her employment at the Fedora her old exuberance of color and figure had returned, greatly to the delight of Ezra Tibbetts.

"Florry," he would say, "you're immense. My, but you're the most wonderful girl I ever saw! If you had any idea what a rampageous peach you are, your head would swell up and explode."

No one else was allowed to talk to Florida that way, and she always scolded Ezra for doing it, but you couldn't blame her for liking it. Now the young man questioned her sharply.

"You're looking worried," he said. "I want you to tell me if everything isn't all right. How's your father?"

"Gaining."

"That's good. Seems to me you're tired, Florida."

"A little; but things are easier now. I'm getting more sleep."

Florida had not told Ezra just how ill her father had been. She dreaded anything like a confession of her extremity. Ezra wasn't making any king's ransom in the way of salary, and she knew that he sent money to his people in Maine. She set her teeth and made covenant with herself never to accept another penny of assistance from him.

She had never forgiven herself for that first loan, which even now was only two-thirds repaid. Bravely she managed to add a dollar or two each week to what she had already returned; but it seemed as if this would not be possible much longer.

Florida's clothes were getting shabby, too. Things she had bought for herself out of her own earnings had not the sturdy quality of the expensive fabrics of her prosperous days. They wore out with dismaying rapidity. She was always mending and darning and turning.

The smiling, friendly Max Cartier came to her work table with increasing frequency. Somehow he always managed to do or say the right thing. He was polished. He exuded an atmosphere of opulence. Not so long ago Florida's father had been equally prosperous. She wondered if the stock market would ever crush Max Cartier as it had crushed Greenbriar Sears.

In spite of her qualms, Cartier's conversation took on greater intimacy with ripening acquaintance. One could not say that he presumed. It was simply that he knew Florida better. There was always something interesting to talk about.

"Are you interested in pictures, Miss Sears?" he asked her one day. "Do you know Stillfield's work?"

Unguardedly, Florida admitted some knowledge of a subject which had always fascinated her.

"There's a very good showing of Stillfield's pictures over at the Queedon Galleries this week. I'm thinking of buying one of them."

"His colors are wonderful," said Florida. "That 'New Hampshire Orchard' of his is beautiful—the one with the sunshine filtering in through the trees. No one else gets just that natural quality; and yet some people regard him as a radical."

Cartier eyed the girl speculatively. She was bending over, her brown hair shining like spun silk.

"If you'd care to," he said, "why don't you run over to Queedon's for a few minutes at lunchtime? That 'New Hampshire Orchard' is in the collection. In fact, that's the one I'm thinking of buying. I want to present it to my club."

Across Florida's mind swept a vision of cool, soothing vistas, soft lights, low-voiced, polite people, sound-deadening carpets. That was Queedon's. She had always loved Queedon's. In it dwelt something of the restfulness of a church. It had always made her feel like saying her prayers. And the pictures! How often had she spent whole days worshipping before them, almost as one kneels at a shrine!

Just to step into Queedon's, out of the jarring, jangling, stressful pitilessness of her life, to forget for a few moments—

"I have my car outside," some one was saying. It was Max Cartier. "I could have you back here in an hour. It would give me great pleasure."

Gravely sympathetic, that voice. It matched her mood—the mood that cried out for the quiet of Queedon's and the beauty of the pictures.

"If it wouldn't be too much trouble," said Florida, "I should enjoy it very much."

That was how it happened. You couldn't blame her, or be in the least surprised, if an hour later you found her seated across

the luncheon table from Cartier, in a restaurant where, in return for the highest prices in New York, you receive the most meticulous attention, amid surroundings that matched those of the Quedon Galleries for peaceful and holy calm.

Florida was late returning to work. In fact, the boss made a note to dock her pay for an hour's unallowed absence. She almost forgot to be polite to her customers that afternoon. Certainly her mind was not on her business.

Next morning she telephoned from home that she could not come to work until noon. The boss grumbled, and figured a second assessment against her salary.

Ezra Tibbetts came in, and was told that Miss Sears might be expected at any minute, so he waited. Finally he was obliged to go back to the office, without seeing Florida. Not knowing just what he feared, Ezra was disturbed. She certainly hadn't been "right" lately.

XIII

To a third-rate brokerage house in Broad Street there came a brown-eyed young woman, neatly dressed in clothes that were beginning to show signs of wear. She entered hesitantly, as if unaccustomed to the procedure of those who patronize such places.

"What can I do for you, madam?" inquired an attaché.

"I want to buy some stock—on margin."

"Oh, I see! What stock are you interested in?"

"I believe it is a curb stock. It is called Sicklesby Copper."

"Yes, yes! It's quite an active issue. The quotation at the moment is nine and five-eighths. A very good buy, madam."

"I want to buy forty shares, on a ten per cent margin."

"At the market, that will cost you thirty-eight dollars and fifty cents, plus the commission. Won't you be seated? I will place your order."

Ten minutes later Florida was on her way uptown. It had taken her all night and all that morning to make up her mind just what to do. Finally, in desperation, she had drawn out all that was left of her savings bank deposit, and with the remnant of last week's pay she had made up the small amount that she had put into the speculation.

Max Cartier had given her the tip at

lunch the day before. She had received it with outward indifference. Not by the flicker of an eyelash would she allow the man to know how carefully she recorded on the tablets of her mind the name of the stock that she could buy to her profit; but she felt that he was reading her thoughts as plainly as if they were printed upon her forehead. It was no use pretending; but she pretended just the same.

That afternoon she eagerly searched the financial reports in a late edition. There it was, Sicklesby Copper, closing at sixteen and a half. Swiftly she computed her profit—two hundred and seventy-five dollars, less the trifling brokerage.

Max Cartier had said the stock would go still higher. Nevertheless, at home she sat down and wrote a note to the brokers, ordering the sale of the stock at the market.

Next morning the head of the house, opening his new client's letter, flipped it to the young man who had made the sale.

"Hang on a while," he said. "That stock's due for a tumble, and then we can sell it and save our bacon."

No tumble came that day. Instead, before the market closed, the stock climbed to twenty dollars a share.

"Might's well take our medicine," grunted the broker. "Report the sale at the opening price this morning, and send her a check."

In this way the broker saved himself the difference between a loss of two hundred and seventy-five dollars and one of four hundred and fifteen dollars. However, Florida Sears never knew that her winnings might have been much greater had he chosen to be honest.

When he signed the check, he looked critically at the name of the payee.

"Wonder if she's old Greenbriar's kid," he thought. "If she's anything like the old man, she'll come back and drop all this into the hopper, and more with it!"

With this comforting thought he attached his signature to the check and put it into his basket.

Wherefore Florida Sears, when she next saw Ezra Tibbetts, paid him the balance of his loan.

"But I don't want you to do this," he said. "Let it go on as it was. Pay me a little at a time. I can't take it, especially when your father's sick."

"Please do," urged Florida. "I'm so glad to have it off my mind."

Reluctantly Ezra pocketed the bills.

"You going to lunch with me to-day?" he asked.

Florida nodded. She was in a nervous kind of good spirits. Somehow it didn't seem like the real thing—or, at least, Ezra thought it didn't. He was distraught and absent-minded.

"Why, Ezra, you've put sugar in your coffee twice!"

"When are you going to marry me?" he demanded brusquely.

"I'm not going to marry you—at least, not that I know of."

"You'd better. You'd better do it soon, too!"

With this cryptic remark Tibbetts called for the check, paid it without permitting Florida to contribute her share, and hustled off unceremoniously to his work. What had got into the boy? Mercy! If he could be so disagreeable about nothing, who would want to marry him?

Max Cartier dropped in that afternoon.

"I was going by," he said easily. "I thought I'd just inquire about your father."

"He's doing nicely, thanks. I had such a wonderful time yesterday! It did me worlds of good."

Oh, Florida Sears! Have you forgotten this man's affront, when you turned him down cold at the Admiral?

"Fine! Some time I hope you'll do me the honor again. By the way, do you happen to remember a remark I dropped about Sicklesby Copper?"

He showed Florida a paper, folded at the market reports.

"That proves what I told you, doesn't it?" he asked. "Keep it to yourself; but watch Turquoise Consolidated the rest of the week."

He said good-by, and was gone. That afternoon Florida sent a messenger boy down town with a letter enclosing a hundred dollars and an order to buy a hundred shares of Turquoise Consolidated. Two days later she sold the stock at a profit of five hundred and fifty dollars.

And then, because the blood of old Greenbriar Sears flowed in her veins, she became a feverish follower of the market reports. She bought nothing, however, waiting for a word from Cartier.

Early the following week Max dropped in; but he did not talk about stocks. This time he was full of the subject of pictures. He wanted Miss Sears's advice concerning a

canvas that one of the Fifth Avenue dealers was showing. Would she please run around there with him that night, after business, and look at it?

Within a few days life had suddenly changed for Florida Sears. Once again the reality of poverty gave place to that old conception of it as an adventure, something evanescent, a passing phase. Again the old life swung within her horizon, almost within reach.

Florida was heartily sick of hardship, of early rising, of cooking, of shoddy, unfashionable clothes that soon wore out, and of all the hopelessness of the poor little apartment that she and a sick old man called home.

Greenbriar, propped up in a chair, fretted and fumed. If she could only get him the things he had always been used to—a man servant who would give him suitable attention; dainty food, temptingly served; a house where one could at least swing a cat, instead of these cramped, dingy, cheap quarters on a cheap street.

And now it seemed as if a magician were about to wave the wand that would make all these things come true. It seemed so easy—just to have inside information which way the market was to swing. Florida put aside the thought that Max Cartier had supposed that she would profit by his lightly dropped hints. Of course, it made no difference to him!

The necessity of thrusting the idea out of her consciousness should have proved to her the significance of its being there at all. But Florida, for the moment, was hypnotized by the prospect of a future divorced from the grind and sordidness that was now her portion.

She stopped work promptly at five o'clock. Before the hotel waited Max Cartier's town car, its owner leaning forward to open the door and assist her as she entered.

"Miss Sears," he said, "will you do me a favor? Let me drive you around to your home, and wait while you get into an evening gown. I've some seats for a show—"

"Oh, I mustn't! I can't leave my father."

"Have your attendant stay for the evening. I promise you won't be very late. After we've seen the picture, we'll have a bite of dinner, and then—won't you? It would give me great pleasure."

Florida had not worn an evening gown for months. To be suitably groomed, to

ride in a good car, to dine as she used to dine, to see a really entertaining play—

"Well, if you don't mind waiting, I'll see if I can arrange it."

Of course she could arrange it. A five-dollar bill for the attendant assured her father's safety and comfort. Fifteen minutes sufficed for her toilet. In the old days, and with a maid's assistance, it would have taken an hour. Florida's fingers had learned to support her since then. The problems of dressing for the evening presented no difficulties.

Radiant, perfectly gowned, she rejoined Max Cartier.

"Quick work!" he said. "You're stunning, if I may be allowed to say so."

The car swung into Fifth Avenue. How long had it been since Florida had looked out upon the afternoon throngs through plate glass? This was her birthright.

They inspected the picture, and Cartier listened to Florida's criticism with respect.

"I shall not buy it," he said. "You have helped me decide. You have wonderful taste. Now we will dine."

Max Cartier had escorted many pretty women into the restaurant where he now accompanied Florida Sears, but never so regal a beauty as she. To-night, greeted respectfully by the *maitre d'hôtel*, he led the way to a table over which he had made love many times.

"Antoine," said the *maitre d'hôtel* to one of the captains, "did you observe M'sieur Cartier?"

"Oui."

"It looks as if he will win, is it not?"

"O-oh! So-oo! That, then, is the beautiful Miss Sears, whose father goes—what you call—broken in stocks? She is the one that becomes a manicure?"

"The same. You know the bet of M'sieur Cartier?"

"Who does not—that he will make her listen to reason inside the year? That bet he make with M'sieur Robert Eckles? I know. M'sieur Robert's valet has told us both."

"Right! This is she. See that they are well served, Antoine."

XIV

"So you see, my dear," said Cartier, "it was all done to help you. I'm glad you've profited; and if you will buy Dominion Foundries to-morrow, I'll promise you'll see a mighty nice result."

"But how is it," asked Florida, "that you are able to say just how the market will go?"

Her eyes were sparkling with excitement. Cartier was a man of power, a leader. What could not such a man aspire to?

She had confessed that she had taken advantage of what he had told her about those two curb stocks; and now, oddly, she was not surprised to hear that he had intended that she should.

"If you'll forgive me," he said, "I've kept rather a close check on your movements, not to say your troubles, during the last few months. I felt that I had harmed you, and I was determined to make reparation. You would accept nothing from me, so you can't blame me if I resorted to a little subterfuge."

Far off at the end of the room, behind a concealing palm forest, an orchestra was strumming softly. Everything about this place was subdued, exquisitely refined, harmonious. Florida compared it shudderingly with the garish glories of the Fedora and with the parvenu splendors of the Stratford and the Admiral. This was an inner shrine of restaurantdom, a retreat for the elect. The spell of it crept into her blood. Too long she had adventured in the jungles of poverty!

At the moment she would have been shocked to be told that one of the jungle marauders had chosen this celestial place as a thicket into which to drag an intended victim. The music trickled soothingly into her consciousness.

"It was kind of you," she heard herself saying. "I didn't realize just how you meant it. I thought you were telling me about those stocks just to amuse me. I must confess the information came at a critical time."

Cartier eyed her devouringly.

"Well, don't forget what I told you about Dominion Foundries," he said. "How many shares can you swing?"

"Not many."

"I will place an order with my broker for your account, to-morrow morning, for two thousand shares," said Cartier.

"Oh, but I never could—"

"Don't worry. He will carry it for you on my indorsement. The stock will jump ten points in three days."

"You mean ten dollars a share?"

The man nodded, his eyes fixed ardently upon the lovely face. The warm color of

excitement suffused Florida's cheek. Her eyes were gleaming.

"Twenty thousand dollars profit!" she exclaimed. "It can't be!"

"I shall perhaps make half a million," he said. "Twenty thousand is a trifle. I wish I might share the big purse with you."

Florida's heart was pounding wildly. The broker was to carry two thousand shares for her merely on Max Cartier's recommendation, without any cash deposit, and she was to make twenty thousand dollars and—mortgage her soul to Cartier. He invested nothing—a pleasant smile, a good dinner in an agreeable place.

She remembered poignantly the poor little sixty dollars she had borrowed from Ezra Tibbetts. Ezra Tibbetts! She saw the troubled look in those blue, kind eyes of Ezra's when she paid him the balance of the loan. He was disquieted. He was worried—about her. Good, honest, true-hearted, bullying Ezra!

"I couldn't let you do that, Mr. Cartier," she said.

"But why not? It doesn't cost me anything. I don't risk a penny."

"I know; but you mustn't do it. I can't let you."

Cartier leaned forward, his elbows on the table, his eyes fixed on the beautiful face of Florida Sears.

"Listen," he said. "You were born to things like this. You don't fit a manicure parlor or a barber shop. Fate didn't intend you for that sort of life. You're too beautiful, too ornamental, for any such purpose. Now let me tell you something. You can't buck fate. Fate says you're to quit that life—you and your father. Fate says he's a very sick man who needs a great many things that he isn't getting now. Fate shows the way."

"Perhaps," said Florida; "but we don't all read fate's sign language the same way."

"There's only one way to read it. I'm fate—that is to say, I'm fate for the time, so far as you're concerned. It comes to you disguised as Max Cartier, and summons you to the things to which you're entitled by right of being the most beautiful woman in New York!"

"But, Mr. Cartier, there's something in the world besides luxury. I adore luxury, fine things, rich things, ease, but—I don't love you, and I can't—can't marry a man I don't love, no matter what the other—er—inducements may be."

Cartier laughed—a sharp, harsh laugh that grated on the ear in contrast with that soft strain from the palm hidden orchestra.

"Well, who said anything about marriage? And as for love, surely I'm not so repellent—"

That was the last Florida heard, because she was out of her chair and fleeing blindly among the ranks of tables. She remembered that phrase—"not so repellent." Cartier had used it the evening he first sat at her table in the Admiral manicure room. He was the same Cartier that he had always been! He hadn't changed. All his consideration, all his friendliness, all his apparent kindness, had been part of a plotted scheme.

Florida hurried to the ladies' room, and ordered a taxi. Cartier sat in the restaurant, where she had left him. He called Antoine.

"Is Mr. Robert Eckles in the house? Tell him Mr. Cartier wants to see him. Tell him I want to pay him a bet. And see here, Antoine—can you get us something to drink? We're in for a big night!"

XV

EZRA TIBBETTS was awakened suddenly by loud knocking on his bedroom door. He had gone to bed early, because his head ached, and had dropped off into a sleep in which he dreamed uneasily about a pair of brown eyes. They were beautiful eyes, and they ought to be frank, but they seemed to be concealing something that Ezra had a right to know.

"Ye're wanted on the phone," said the landlady's voice.

Ezra got into a blanket bathrobe designed by artists of the same school as those responsible for the Mackinaw patterns back home. In the lower hall he heard:

"Ezra? Mr. Tibbetts?"

"Hello! Yes, this is Mr. Tibbetts," replied Ezra, not recognizing the voice that came over the wire.

"Well, this is Florida Sears. Ezra, can you come to me? I want to see you."

Florida's voice sounded very small and faint.

"Surest thing you know! Speak up, honey; I can scarcely hear you."

"Well, come to the ladies' parlor at the Fedora. I want—I want you to take me to supper."

"But, honey, I've had my sup—oh, I'm a chump! Listen, are you all right?"

Sounds like something serious. I'll get a move on."

"All right! I'll be waiting for you."

Ezra's eyes nearly popped out of his head when he saw Florida, in her evening gown, waiting for him at the Fedora.

"Golly! Why the glad rags? And say, honey, aren't you chilly? This is bad weather for colds."

"Ezra, dear, can we go into the café and find a quiet corner where we can talk?"

"Sure! But what's the matter with here?"

"It's so stuffy! I'm suffocating."

"I'm hardly dolled up enough to do you justice, but I'm certainly a game bird. Come along!"

Back in a corner, behind a pillar and some imitation banana trees, Florida, her face still flushed with excitement and a score of other emotions, tried to make Ezra understand what had happened.

"I'd have asked you to come to the apartment," she said; "but you know dad's sick, and the attendant is there, and—well, it's not attractive. Ezra, do you know that you're the best, the most honest, loyal, and worth-while friend I have?"

"Well," said Ezra, "I might not state it that strongly; but as you've put it into such well chosen words, I suppose I'd better agree with you. All this is leading up to—what?"

"The other day you said I'd better marry you and do it soon. After what has happened, I think I agree with you."

"Great Scott, honey! What has happened to you?"

"I've been about as foolish as a girl who values her reputation could be, and I need a guardian. Ezra, dear, how much salary do you get?"

"Sixty bucks a week."

"Well, if I keep my job, don't you think we could live comfortably and take care of poor old dad?"

"We can do all that, even if you don't work; and believe me, when we're married, you quit holding other guys' hands! But what's all this about your being so foolish?"

"You heard me speak of Max Cartier the other day?"

"M-m! What about that wolf in sheep's clothing? I saw you getting into his limousine the other day."

"Ezra, you didn't?"

"I did. It jarred me some, too."

"It was all right. We were going to Queedon's to look at some pictures. But an odd thing happened. Cartier dropped a hint about a stock that he said was—"

"No!" cried Ezra. "Well, what did you do about it?"

"Bought forty shares on margin."

"And made money?"

"Yes."

"Well, there isn't a man in the market who knows as much about what is going to happen to stocks of a certain class as that fellow Cartier. But, honey, do you think that was a proper thing for a nice young lady to do?"

"It was just as proper as borrowing sixty dollars from a gentleman."

"That's entirely different. What else has happened?"

Florida told Ezra of her second transaction and its result. Finally, and with hesitation, she told him of the occurrences of that evening.

"The skunk!" raged Ezra. "The low-bred skunk! He ought to be shot. So that's what made you realize little old Ezra wasn't so bad, after all! Well, honey, it was tough. I wonder, now—"

The young man sat for perhaps five minutes in deep thought.

"I must say," Florida commented, "that for a chap who has just become engaged to an heiress, I should call you rather an uneventful fiancé."

"I was thinking, as you may have observed," said Ezra. "Tell me, is your father's first name Greenbriar?"

"Yes—didn't you know that?"

"No. Wasn't he the man who owned the Northern Junction Railway, and a lot of other properties, out in Idaho or some place? I ran across some old papers today and read about a financier named Sears getting trimmed by a rival crowd of speculators. Was that your dad?"

"That was my poor old dad."

"Do you know who it was that put the rollers under the Northern Junction, and skinned Greenbriar Sears out of every dollar he owned?"

"No—I never discussed business with father."

"Well, I'll tell you. It was Max Cartier and his gang—that's who it was. So, you see, Cartier isn't exactly a friend of your family."

Florida shuddered. Cartier's pleasant, kindly eyes swam into her vision, and in

them glanced the lights one sees in the eyes of a jungle cat ready to spring.

"By the way, what was that stock he told you to-night was a good buy?"

"Dominion Foundries."

"H-m! I know some big operators down town who'll be delighted with that bit of information. I'll bet I'll have them on the telephone before you're an hour older! What they won't do to Mr. Max Cartier to-morrow won't be worth doing. They've been waiting for his hide a long time. Incidentally, I'll put just a few hundred dollars of my own hard-earned money on the result; so I guess we can take pretty good

care of your father—eh, honey? I'm going to see you home now. I hope that gown of yours isn't worth more than four or five hundred dollars, because I'm going to muss it something fierce on the way!"

"Mr. Tibbetts," said Florida, "I shall have to ask the Fedora housekeeper to ride home with us. I can't be alone with you in a taxi without a chaperon."

"Is that so?" demanded Ezra. "Well, you do that, and the Fedora'll lose not only its prettiest manicure, but its housekeeper besides. George, bring us our check—great Scott, we've sat here nearly an hour and haven't ordered a thing!"

THE END

THE FOOL AND HIS HEART

I WORE my heart upon my sleeve—

'Tis most unwise, they say, to do;

But then how could I but believe

The foolish thing was safe with you?

Yet, had I known, 'twere safer far

With wolves and tigers; the wild sea

Were kinder to it than you are—

Sweetheart, how you must laugh at me!

Yet am I glad I did not know

That creatures of such tender bloom,

Beneath their sanctuary snow,

Were such cold ministers of doom;

For had I known as I began

To kiss you, ere we flung apart,

I had not been so glad a man,

Or held my lady to my heart.

If I am lonely here to-night,

With empty eyes, the cause is this—

Your face it was that gave me sight;

My heart ran over with your kiss.

Still do I think that what I laid

Before the altar of your face,

Flowers of words that shall not fade,

Were worthy of a moment's grace;

Some thoughtless, lightly dropped largess,

A touch of your immortal hand

Laid on my brow in tenderness,

Though you could never understand;

And yet with hungered lips to touch

Your feet of pearl, and in your face

To look awhile was overmuch;

In heaven is not so fair a place

As, broken-hearted, at your feet

To lie there and to kiss them, sweet!

Richard Leigh

